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NATURAL HISTORY
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Scarce migrant birds in
2011–12: passerines

The Spotted Crake in the UK

Eastern Grasshopper Warbler:
new to Britain



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Editorial

Roger Riddington
Spindrift, Eastshore,
Virkie, Shetland ZE3 9JS
Tel: 01950 460080
editor@britishbirds.co.uk

'News & comment' material to
Adrian Pitches
adrianpitches@blueyonder.co.uk

Subscriptions & administration

Hazel Jenner
4 Harlequin Gardens,
St Leonards on Sea,
East Sussex TN37 7PF
Tel & fax: 01424 755155
subscriptions@britishbirds.co.uk

Design & production

Mark Corliss
m.corliss@netmatters.co.uk

Advertising

Mathew Hance, Digital Spring Ltd,
Golden Cross House, 8 Duncannon
Street, London WC2N 4JF
Tel: 0870 803 3737
BB@digital-spring.co.uk

Guidelines for contributors

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British Birds

Editorial staff Roger Riddington (Editor),
Caroline Dudley, Peter Kennerley
Editorial Board Dawn Balmer, Ian Carter,
Richard Chandler, Martin Collinson,
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Millington, Mike Pennington,
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Secretary Nigel Hudson, Carn Ithen, Trench
Lane, Old Town, St Mary's, Scilly TR21 0PA;
secretary@bbrc.org.uk

Notes Panel

Angela Turner (Chair), Will Cresswell,
Ian Dawson, Jim Flegg, Ian Newton,
Malcolm Ogilvie

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Front-cover photograph: Arctic Redpoll *Acanthis h. hornemanni*, Aldeburgh, Suffolk, December 2012.

Kevin Du Rose

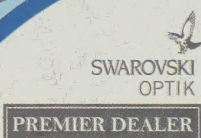


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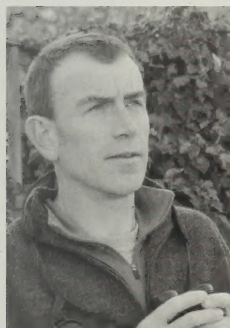
British Birds

Volume 108 • Number 4 • April 2015

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As dawn broke on April Fool's Day last year, I was shivering in the Negev Desert, straining to try and hear a distant Eagle Owl above the sound of chattering teeth. It was the start of a gruelling day's birdwatching in southern Israel, the inaugural 'Champions of the Flyway' event. This year *BB's* participation comes in the form of a BBRC team, who I'm sure will cope well with the logistical challenges – planning is everything, as the Americans showed us last year. As in 2014, the race is raising money to combat the illegal killing of birds; this year the spotlight is on the illegal hunting and trapping that is widespread in Cyprus. In fact, the scale of the problem is staggering – as the news item on p. 188 outlines. Somehow, the eastern Mediterranean 'feels' close to home – yet making progress on this issue will be a tough nut to crack for BirdLife Cyprus and they are a

deserving focus for this year's race. If you haven't already done so, there is still time to support the cause by going to: www.justgiving.com/COTF2015BV

Some of the species that fall victim to the lime sticks and mist-nets of the Cypriot hunters can be found elsewhere in this issue, in the Scarce Migrants report, which covers the passerines seen in Britain in 2011–12. Based partly on the data in this report, the decision was taken at the recent BBRC AGM (again, more details in our news pages) that four of the passerines currently classed as scarce migrants will be moving back to the 'top table' of national rarity status, from the start of 2015, with four other species moving in the opposite direction. Just 30 years ago we were still waiting for Britain's first Lesser Scaup, while Blyth's Reed Warbler was a mythical rarity. And now we can look forward to both species in the Scarce Migrants report, which seems extraordinary. Although when you look at what has happened to our farmland birds in that time, the speed of change shouldn't really surprise us.

Roger Riddington



British Birds aims to: ❖ provide an up-to-date magazine for everyone interested in the birds of the Western Palearctic; ❖ publish a range of material on behaviour, conservation, distribution, ecology, identification, movements, status and taxonomy as well as the latest ornithological news and book reviews; ❖ maintain its position as the journal of record; and ❖ interpret scientific research on birds in an easily accessible way.

Where next for your notebooks?

In recent years, I have become increasingly concerned about the long-term future of my personal bird records that I have been keeping faithfully for almost 60 years, initially in handwritten notebooks and latterly as computer printouts. Will they be of interest to anyone in the future and, more importantly, are the contents of any value?

I know of two other keen Norfolk birders who have been keeping meticulous notes since the 1950s and who share my concern – and I suspect that there are plenty of other BB readers out there in the same position. So what can be done to ensure that our lovingly kept records are simply not thrown away after our departure from this earthly life?

The late Richard Richardson – renowned Norfolk bird artist and field ornithologist, who died in 1977 – itemised virtually all his, admittedly rather meagre, possessions as specific bequests in his will. These included his migration records, Norfolk bird diaries and ringing logs from the days of the Cley Bird Observatory, all of which were bequeathed to Michael Seago, while the Alexander Library at Oxford University was the beneficiary of

his personal bird diaries from the 1940s and his album of original bird sketches. Clearly, he was concerned that they should be in safe hands for future researchers. It was only through that foresight that I was able to compile such a comprehensive account of his life in his biography *Guardian Spirit of the East Bank*, published in 2002.

Prior to his untimely death in 1999, Michael Seago (who had been the editor of the *Norfolk Bird Report* for 45 years since its inception in 1953) had approached me about the future care of the many boxes of record cards used to compile the annual county reports. At that time they were stored in Michael's loft and he was finding it increasingly difficult to climb the loft ladder to get access to them. He enquired whether I would be prepared to take over as custodian of this unique collection of Norfolk bird archives. Not only were all the cards handwritten, but they also included the original descriptions of many of the rarities and replies from BBRC, an irreplaceable resource for future research. Needless to say, they are now safely stored in my 'archive room', and have proved

invaluable as a source of reference for several authors of articles on Norfolk's ornithological history from the 1950s to the 1990s. But where will they go in the future?

A few years earlier, I had been approached by the widow of David Butt to ask if I was interested in having his records. David, a teacher at Cromer School, had also been a keen bird-watcher for many years and had kept an almost daily diary

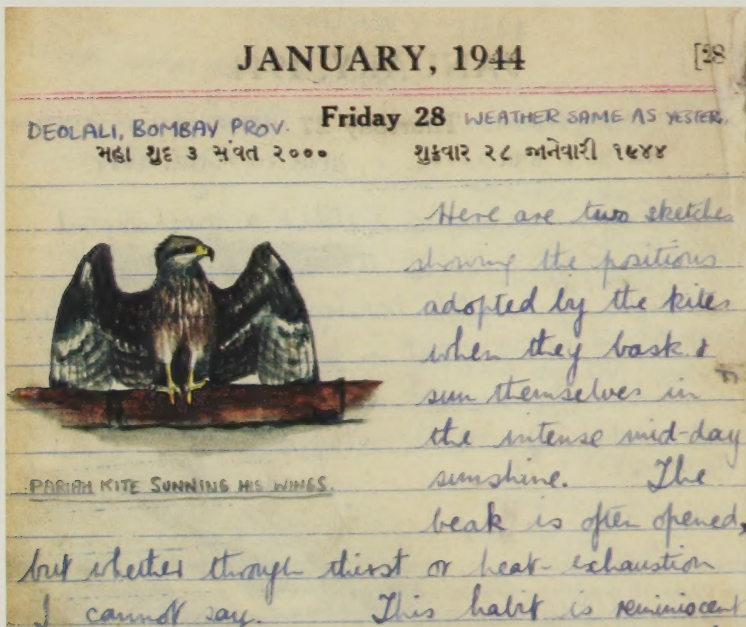


Fig. 1. An extract from Richard Richardson's Indian diaries.

of his bird sightings for 45 years, which ran to more than 40 notebooks and another 20 loose-leaf folders. I readily agreed to take them, the alternative being that they simply would have been thrown away.

David lived at Bury St Edmunds, in Suffolk, as a young boy and started his first diary on 1st January 1945. Initially this was simply a list of sightings but within a few months it had become a record of carefully observed bird behaviour. As time went on, David began to include daily weather notes, counts of birds and reports of his excursions into Breckland and farther afield. Even though he moved to north Norfolk in the 1960s, the Brecks and in particular the Stanford Training Area (STANTA) remained one of his favourite destinations. David's notes made in this area during a 30-year period are a unique record of the changing birdlife over three decades and will undoubtedly be of great value in the future.

Back in the 1970s, before the advent of first Birdline and then pagers, Nancy's Café at Cley became the focal point for news about rare bird sightings, not only in Norfolk but also farther afield. In August 1975 a hard-backed notebook was started as a diary, in which birds of interest could be recorded for the benefit of other birders, a tradition that continued without a break until the café closed in 1988. When Nancy Gull (a strangely appropriate surname) finally retired and closed the café, she and her husband Jack moved from Cley to Sheringham, to be near her daughter Maria. On one of my visits to her as her general practitioner (in those days we made home visits!), she gave me the collection of diaries covering the years 1975 to 1988, rather than simply throwing them away. What a tremendous loss of birding history that would have been. Those diaries became the first of several collections of birding memorabilia that I have subsequently accumulated.

During the lengthy preparatory work of gathering information and anecdotes for inclusion in Richard Richardson's biography, I naturally built up an extensive archive, much of which could not be included in the book. This additional material, consisting of letters, photographs, line-drawings and watercolours by Richard, as well as his Cley

Bird Observatory logs and photograph album that were given to me by Michael Seago's widow, are among some of my most valued possessions. Inadvertently, I have thus become the custodian of some of Norfolk's irreplaceable bird records. But what is the best way to ensure that they will remain as a future resource for students of the county's past ornithological history?

Nowadays, contemporary records are archived electronically, but while earlier written records can also be digitised, to my mind this is not the same as holding and reading the original material. Some of the material described above is surely in the 'national treasure' category, and eventually might be best archived securely, for example at the Norfolk Record Office or the Norfolk Biological Centre, or perhaps at the BTO or the Alexander Library. At a national level, the late Phil Hollom's family is currently discussing how best to preserve his diaries and notebooks to ensure that they are available to future generations. However, a wider problem concerns those personal notebooks and diaries that I described at the start, long runs of which will contain an incredible amount of local ornithological history. This is a much more widespread issue, and I suspect largely a generational one for those of us who started birding between the 1940s and 1980s, or until home computers became commonplace. Unless we want our carefully compiled records to end up in a recycling bin, the problem of their long-term storage needs to be addressed. Where will *your* records go?

Moss Taylor



News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

Nearly one million songbirds trapped on British base in Cyprus

The numbers of trapped songbirds killed illegally on a British military base in Cyprus last autumn reached an estimated 900,000 – the highest level recorded in 12 years, according to the latest RSPB-funded research of trapping activity on the Dhekelia Sovereign Base Area, close to the tourist hotspot of Ayia Napa.

The RSPB and BirdLife Cyprus are now urging the Base Area authorities to continue the positive start made late last year to clamp down on the illegal trappers by removing acacia scrub planted by the trappers to attract vast numbers of migrating songbirds down to nets hidden within the scrub.

Small-scale trapping of songbirds for human consumption on Cyprus was practised for many centuries but it has been illegal on the island for 40 years. Unfortunately, organised crime now seems to be driving this activity, which is thought to be worth millions of euros every autumn from the songbirds the trappers kill on British MoD land and then sell to consume illegally in the Republic.

BirdLife Cyprus and the RSPB have been monitoring illegal trapping activity on the British military base at Dhekelia since 2002. The figures for last autumn reveal that 2014 was by far the worst year on record, three times higher than when the monitoring started in 2002. Comparative totals for the Republic reveal that, although the figures have decreased since 2002, illegal bird-trapping is still a considerable issue. This is probably because of the more extensive areas of illegally planted acacia scrub on MoD land.

Tim Stowe, the RSPB's International Director, said: 'The report highlights that the illegal trapping of songbirds on the British military base has escalated and we are urging the Ministry of Defence and the Base Area authorities to resolve it before this autumn's migration. Such extensive illegal activity requires all the Cyprus authorities to work

together to combat it, and the Base Area's contribution should be zero tolerance towards illegal bird-trapping.

'We're pleased that the Base Area authorities started to remove acacia scrub last December. We believe the scale of illegal trapping requires continuing and sustained action, and we'll continue to offer our support.'

Clairie Papazoglou, Executive Director of BirdLife Cyprus, said: 'Acacia isn't a native plant in Cyprus, so the planting of extensive stands of this shrub by the trappers is a highly visible symbol of their flagrant disregard for anti-trapping laws. By removing the acacia, the Sovereign Base Area authorities would send a clear signal that they will not tolerate the slaughter of birds on British bases.'

The songbirds are trapped to provide the main ingredient for the local and expensive delicacy of *ambelopoulia*, where a plate of songbirds, such as Blackcaps *Sylvia atricapilla* or Robins *Erithacus rubecula*, is served to restaurant diners. The illegality of the practice and the high profits are attracting the attention of organised crime gangs.

Today, most trappers will use mist-nets and play bird calls to lure tired migrants in. Traditionally, trappers relied solely on lime sticks, where stems of pomegranate were coated in a locally manufactured 'lime' and then placed in trees and bushes. Alighting birds became stuck on the lime-coated sticks and were easy prey for the trappers. While lime sticks are still used in many areas, mist-netting between planted avenues of acacia has now taken the slaughter to a whole new level.

Since 2002, the monitoring programme has recorded over 150 different bird species which have become trapped in nets or on lime sticks. Cyprus has two endemic breeding species – Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax* and Cyprus Wheatear *Oenanthe cyprica* – both of which are affected by illegal trapping.

Changes at BBRC

Some decisions from the BBRC AGM, in mid March, were available for N&c as we were going to press. First of all, the meeting marked the retirement of Adam Rowlands after seven years as chairman. On behalf of everyone at BB, and BBRC, we say a very big thank you to Adam for all his hard work, his breadth and depth of knowledge

of the British rarity scene and masterly skills of tact and diplomacy during that time. At the meeting, Adam was presented with an original painting of Citrine Wagtails *Motacilla citreola* by current voting member Richard Millington (plate 113). Adam said: 'It has been a privilege to serve on BBRC for the last 15 years and I have made

many good friends along the way. It is great to be departing with BBRC in such a strong position and the AGM discussions and outcomes confirmed my feeling that the future is bright.'

One of the key discussions at most BBRC AGMs concerns the definition of a rarity, and how current rates of occurrence affect what species are on the Committee's list of national rarities. This year's debate used the data from the Scarce Migrants report published in last month's *BB* and on pp. 192–219. There has been a statistical definition of what constitutes a national rarity for some time now but, as noted in the introduction to the most recent annual report (*Brit. Birds* 107: 580), BBRC now considers a threshold of about ten records a year *in combination with* an analysis of trends in occurrence and information on changes in distribution and population levels in key source areas. More detail on the reasoning will be set out in an announcement from the Committee in the near future, but in the meantime N&c can confirm that, with effect from 1st January 2015, four species will be removed from the list of national rarities –



Paul French

113. Adam Rowlands (left) and BBRC Secretary Nigel Hudson, March 2015.

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*, Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*, Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* and Citrine Wagtail – while four species will be added – Aquatic Warbler *A. paludicola*, Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*, Red-throated Pipit *A. cervinus* and Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*.

Music festival out of tune with nesting Ospreys

Plans to relocate an Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* nest to reduce the impact of the 'T In The Park' music festival at Strathallan Castle, in Perthshire, appeared to be in disarray as the raptors began to return to Scotland in March.

The RSPB criticised the festival organisers, DF Concerts Limited, as appearing poorly organised and unprofessional. The Society cautioned that, unless a clear plan to deal with Ospreys and other wildlife emerged, it would be too late to ensure that Scotland's biggest music festival can go ahead as planned in July without unnecessary impacts on wildlife at the site.

The festival promoters were planning to remove the existing Osprey nest at Strathallan and construct a new nest a few hundred metres away before the birds return for the breeding season. Moving an Osprey nest like this is unusual in Scotland but has been done successfully on a number of occasions, such as when Ospreys nest near power lines and need to be moved

for safety reasons.

Of real concern to the RSPB was that work had not been done as Ospreys began returning to southern England. And it would be illegal to disturb the birds once they had returned to the site. RSPB Scotland is monitoring the situation and would send any information regarding active nest disturbances to Police Scotland for urgent investigation. In addition, the promoters must undertake other habitat creation work for other species, such as Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* and ground-nesting species, to mitigate wider impacts.

A spokesperson for RSPB Scotland said: 'The details of how T In The Park will avoid harming wildlife should have been sorted out many months ago. If it was well planned, there is no reason why the festival shouldn't be able to happen at this site and result in no overall harm to wildlife – but we have yet to be given anything like the reassurances we need.'

£5,000 fine for ibis escapes

A Cumbrian zoo has been fined for allowing a third of its Sacred Ibises *Threskiornis aethiopicus* to escape. South Lakes Wild Animal Park (SLWAP) and its owner David Gill were both convicted at Kendal Magistrates Court of three counts of 'allowing to

escape into the wild a species that is not ordinarily resident or a regular visitor to Great Britain in a wild state' contrary to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. SLWAP was fined £5,000 plus £370 costs and Gill was fined £2,000 plus £870 costs. The maximum

sentence for this offence is two years in prison.

The ibises were spotted on the south Cumbrian coast around Dalton-in-Furness in July 2013. A non-native, potentially invasive species, the Sacred Ibis is perceived by Defra to pose such a potentially significant threat to native wildlife that it is one of only a handful of species for which the Government has put an action plan in place.

In France, there is now a feral population of about 3,000 Sacred Ibises, mainly on the estuaries of the Atlantic coast, following escapes from zoos since the 1990s. Following the sightings on the Cumbrian coast, an ornithologist working for the Animal and Plant Health Agency established that the ibises originated from SLWAP and the matter was referred to the National Wildlife Crime Unit and Cumbria Police. When all three agencies executed a search warrant at the zoo in October 2013, officers found a large open enclosure with 27 Sacred Ibises – but the zoo's log recorded 36 birds.

Officers filmed birds flying out of the park; the zoo owner David Gill explained that he was aware of the problem and was trying to resolve the situation. He said that the problem related to birds that had hatched in 2013 but had not had their wings

clipped. However, zoo records showed no breeding in 2013. Indeed, ring records showed that some of the escaped birds had hatched in 2009. After Gill was interviewed, he returned to the zoo and shot 13 free-flying ibises.

On sentencing Gill, District Judge Daniel Chalk said: 'Some of the birds that were flying out of the park were four years old and it appears more than a third of the zoo's Sacred Ibises were capable of flight. I find it inconceivable that you and your staff were unaware of that fact.' He added that there was a serious risk to the British countryside if the birds became established.

Following the case, Andy McWilliam of the National Wildlife Crime Unit said: 'The threat to our natural wildlife from Sacred Ibises is very real. They could inflict serious damage on the likes of ground-nesting birds. It is imperative that people keeping any potentially invasive species ensure that they are secure and there is no risk of escape. Having free-flying Sacred Ibises housed in open enclosures was simply unacceptable.'

(This is one of many news items about wildlife crime in the latest issue of the RSPB's excellent investigations newsletter, *Legal Eagle*)

Government listens to Nightingales plea

The Government has listened to the pleas of over 12,000 people concerned about the future of England's finest Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* site by 'calling in' for public inquiry an application to build 5,000 homes on Lodge Hill in Kent, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (see *Brit. Birds* 107: 575–576).

Martin Harper, the RSPB's Conservation Director, said: 'There has been public outrage and condemnation that a site of national importance for wildlife has been considered for development without public scrutiny. We are delighted that the Government has listened to these concerns, and has reached the only logical conclusion.'

'Through an inquiry we hope and expect that this development will be rejected and the future of

this SSSI will be secured. The important issue of housing allocation in North Kent should proceed without impacting on nationally important wildlife sites.'

Lodge Hill is perhaps the most important site for Nightingales in England. It also has other nationally important features, such as rare types of grassland and ancient woodland.

The RSPB has been campaigning jointly with the Kent Wildlife Trust, Buglife, Butterfly Conservation and the Woodland Trust, a campaign which attracted a 12,400-signature petition. The Government has recognised that public support for the protection of the site was influential in encouraging ministers to decide to call in the decision for public inquiry.

Asian songbirds in trouble

A new study published in BirdLife's journal *Bird Conservation International* reveals that many migratory songbirds that use the East Asian–Australasian Flyway are declining, owing to a range of threats operating across many countries.

Species such as the Vulnerable Ijima's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus ijimae* and Styan's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella pleskei* are particularly at risk, not only because of their small breeding ranges but also because their entire

wintering ranges remain unknown, thus hampering effective conservation. The Endangered Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* used to be abundant but has declined drastically as large numbers are trapped annually for food in south-east Asia and southern China.

The study goes on to highlight ways in which these declines can be stopped. Conservation of key habitats, better protection of key breeding, migration and wintering sites, and better enforcement of

national legislation will all be needed. Additionally, international treaties need to be extended beyond migratory waterbirds and raptors to include songbirds.

One priority identified in the paper is to expand and standardise monitoring and increase research to understand populations and threats in more detail. This will need to target some of the most poorly known – and charismatic – migratory

songbirds in Asia, including the Vulnerable Rufous-headed Robin *Larvivora ruficeps* and Blackthroat *Callope obscura*.

One promising development is a new project which BirdLife Asia is helping to develop in China, South Korea and Japan, to promote international co-operation on the monitoring and conservation of migratory landbirds.

Scotland's Big Nature Festival chooses the Curlew

The UK is a global stronghold for the Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*, supporting as much as a quarter of the global breeding population (an estimated 68,000 pairs). Similarly important numbers also occur during winter, thanks to arrivals from Fennoscandia. Yet, although it is very familiar to most British birders, this is a species under threat. *Bird Atlas 2007–11* illustrated its loss from parts of western Scotland, southwest England and the Welsh uplands, while the situation across Ireland is particularly dire – the breeding range there has plummeted by a staggering 78% in 40 years.

Consequently, RSPB Scotland has chosen the Curlew as the featured species for Scotland's Big Nature Festival this year. This two-day event, which includes the Scottish Birdfair, will take place on 23rd–24th May, and all of the funds raised will go towards conserving this spectacular wader. Now in its fourth year, the festival is being held at a new venue for 2015. Musselburgh Lagoons in East Lothian is a premier birding hotspot with an

impressive array of birds and other wildlife – including the Curlew. The site was created on land claimed from the sea using pulverised fuel ash, a by-product of Cockenzie Power Station, and is now an SSSI and SPA site managed by East Lothian Council.

Over the weekend there will be plenty of attractions for keen birders and families alike including talks, a seabird cruise, ringing demonstrations, wildlife photography workshops, optics demos and nature walks. The festival boasts over 100 exhibitors and is part of the Scottish Government's 'Year of Food and Drink Scotland 2015' programme. Each day there will also be a talk on the Curlew, explaining why it's a featured species for RSPB Scotland and the action we can take for population recovery. For more information, visit: www.scottishbirdfair.org.uk

A paper on the current status and global significance of the UK's Curlew population, prepared by a team of authors from RSPB Scotland, is scheduled to appear in *BB* later this year.

BB grant for Woodlark project, in memory of Phil Hollom

In memory of Phil Hollom, a donation of £1,080 has been made by the *BB* Charitable Trust, to help with a current project on Woodlarks *Lullula arborea*. The Woodlark is a conservation priority species in Britain; although the population is generally increasing, the species remains vulnerable and is currently declining at one site that supports nationally important numbers, Thetford Forest. And since the species' winter movements and habitat use are still largely unknown, this is a large gap in our knowledge of its ecology.

The Woodlark is a partial migrant, moving to wintering sites either within southern Britain or across the English Channel, but increasing records

of birds wintering in East Anglia suggests that many may not travel that far. Work is urgently required to establish the importance of proximity and access to overwintering habitat for the breeding population and to understand the scale of movement and the extent of habitats used.

A GPS tracking project designed by BTO researchers will help us to plug some of the gaps in our knowledge and the *BB* grant will cover the purchase of three GPS tags. The money was given to this particular BTO project after discussions with Phil Hollom's family and it is not inconceivable that some of the tagged birds may visit the heaths close to his home in Surrey.

For extended versions of many of the stories featured here, and much more, visit our website www.britishbirds.co.uk

Report on scarce migrant birds in Britain in 2011–12

Part 2: passerines

Steve White and Chris Kehoe



Alan Harris

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*

Abstract This report presents data on scarce passerine migrants recorded in Britain during 2011–12. The year 2011 was one of highs and lows – it was the best year on record for Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*, Woodchat Shrike *L. senator*, Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* and Common Rosefinch *Erythrina erythrina*, yet it was the worst year on record for both Red-backed Shrike *L. collurio* and Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* and a notably poor year for several other species, including Icterine *Hippolais icterina* and Aquatic Warblers *Acrocephalus paludicola*, Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* and Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*. The year 2012 was a record year for Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*, but also a very poor year for Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* and (again) Ortolan. Reinforcing the findings of the two previous reports, covering the years 2004–10, several of the species treated here – Aquatic Warbler, Tawny and Red-throated Pipit *A. cervinus* and

Rustic Bunting *E. rustica* in particular – are currently genuinely rare birds in Britain. Some notable individual records included an adult Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria* in autumn (in Orkney in October 2012), the first-ever Icterine Warbler in winter (on Scilly in February 2012), a winter record of European Serin *Serinus serinus*, also on Scilly, this time in December 2012, and the first Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus* away from the breeding grounds since 1995 – in Sussex in January–February 2012. The continued increase in wintering by Yellow-browed Warblers *P. inornatus* and Richard's Pipits *A. richardi* was apparent, and there was further clarification on the numbers of wintering 'Siberian Chiffchaffs' *P. collybita tristis*.

Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

Total 1968–2012	No. 2011 (rank/45)	No. 2012 (rank/45)	Other annual maxima 1968–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
3,915	79 (22)	182 (3)	1994/235/1 1992/184/2	Declining	Moderate

Annual means 1968–2009
1968–69 34
1970–79 51
1980–89 84
1990–99 132
2000–09 85
2010–12 108

Migrant Golden Orioles in Britain increased until the early/mid 1990s before declining. More recently it appears that numbers have stabilised, albeit at a lower level, and it is possible that these changes are related to the collapse of the British breeding population (Holling *et al.* 2014) rather than lower numbers of continental migrants. Nonetheless, 2012 produced the third-highest total since 1968, and a higher total than most years when the breeding population was flourishing.

The first was at Torbay (Devon) on the early date of 13th April 2012. Over the two years, ten were recorded in April, 206 in May and 34 in June, of which 82 were reported as males and 37 as females. Autumn birds were, as usual, much scarcer with a combined total of just 11, in July and early August.

The species' distribution was similar to that of recent years with the largest totals being 76 on Scilly and 28 in Yorkshire; only four were recorded in Wales, while Shetland's total of 13 was the highest in Scotland.

(Breeds NW Africa & widely throughout Europe from Mediterranean N to S Sweden & S Finland, Russia, Turkey & Caucasus to NW Iran. Winters equatorial & southern Africa.)

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

Total 1986–2012	No. 2011 (rank/27)	No. 2012 (rank/27)	Other annual maxima 1986–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
5,779	91 (27)	186 (15)	1988/423/1 1998/374/2	Declining	Moderate

Annual means 1986–2012
1986–89 256
1990–99 231
2000–09 202
2010–12 139

The year 2011, with 91 records, was the first in which the annual total fell below 100 since records were first collated, in 1986, while that for 2012 was also lower than the recent average (fig. 1).

The earliest, a male on Fair Isle on 11th May 2012, was part of a spring total of 170 over the two years, most of which arrived in May. Of these, 111 (65%) were in Scotland, including 43 in Shetland, 33 in Orkney and 22 on Fair Isle, comfortably exceeding the highest total for any English region, which was 18 (11%) in the southwest.

The distribution of the 107 autumn records (July to the first week of November) was rather less skewed, with 43 (40%) in Scotland, again mostly in

the Northern Isles, and 27 (25%) in south-west England. The latest was at Weybourne (Norfolk) on 9th November 2012.

The English east coast had similar proportions in both spring and autumn, with 50

and 30 records respectively. Throughout the two years 26 were seen in Norfolk and 19 in Yorkshire. There were just four Welsh records and two in inland counties of England, in Greater London and Wiltshire.

(Widespread breeder from N Spain E to Greece & N through Europe to c. 67°N in Sweden & Finland, Russia E to Ob River in C Siberia, Turkey & Caucasus region S to NW Iran. Winters equatorial & S Africa.)

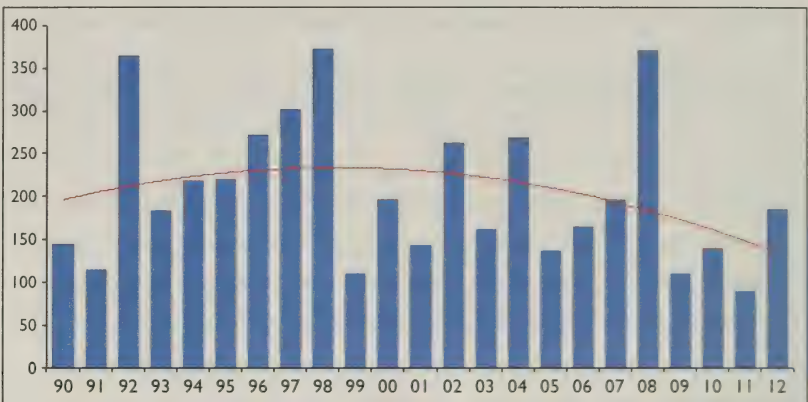


Fig. 1. Annual totals of Red-backed Shrikes *Lanius collurio* in Britain, 1990–2012.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*

Total 1986–2012	No. 2011 (rank/27)	No. 2012 (rank/27)	Other annual maxima 1986–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
3,831	327 (1)	177 (5)	2010/266/2	1998/238/3	Increasing	Moderate

Annual means 1986–2012
1986–89 132
1990–99 128
2000–09 126
2010–12 257

Great Grey Shrikes often return year after year to favoured wintering territories, and 128 (20%) of the 632 records that were reported in 2011–12 were judged to be returning birds and omitted from this analysis – and even this was perhaps something of an underestimate. Nonetheless, the 2011 total was the highest ever and the 177 in 2012 the fifth best. Average numbers hardly varied between the late 1980s and 2009 but have doubled over

the past three years; whether or not this trend is maintained remains to be seen.

Great Grey Shrikes were reported from 64 recording areas, making the species our most widespread scarce migrant – although the Great White Egret appears to be closing in on it rapidly. Shetland and the east coast of England were particularly favoured by short-staying migrants, with 80 in Norfolk, 51 in Yorkshire, 30 in Shetland, 26 in Suffolk and 21 in Lincolnshire over the two years.



Bill Baston

114. Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*, Lower Layham, Suffolk, February 2012.

A total of 122 birds was logged as spring (March to May) arrivals, while all but 17 of the 206 that turned up in October and November seem to have been on passage. Adding these 17 to the 172 that were first seen between December and February produces an average wintering population of just under 100 birds. However, wintering Great Grey Shrikes can be elusive and often frequent remote areas not regularly visited by birders, so this is likely to be a significant underestimate.

(Breeds Scandinavia, C Europe & Russia E across Siberia to Pacific coast, Alaska and N Canada. Northern breeders migratory, wintering to S of breeding range.)

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
965	55 (1)	29 (5)	1997/36/2	2002/32/3	Increasing	Moderate

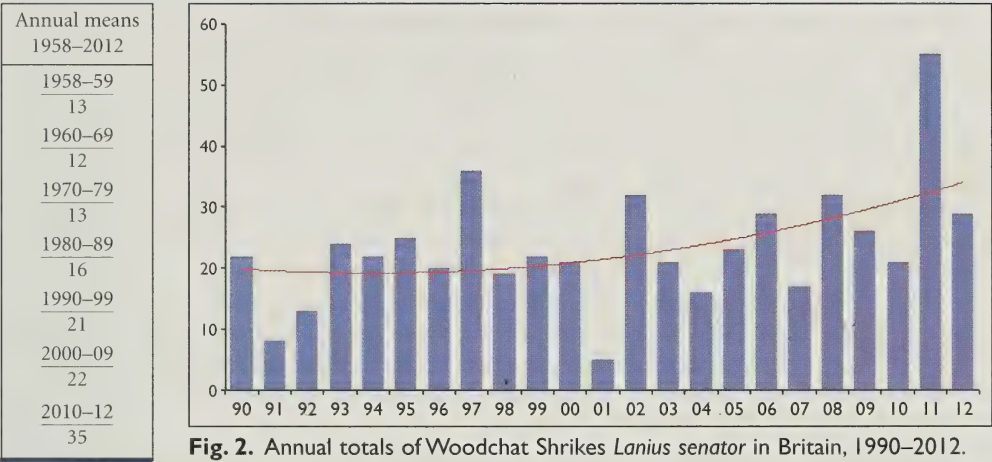


Fig. 2. Annual totals of Woodchat Shrikes *Lanius senator* in Britain, 1990–2012.



Gary Thoburn

115. Female Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*, Chipping Sodbury, Gloucestershire, August 2011.

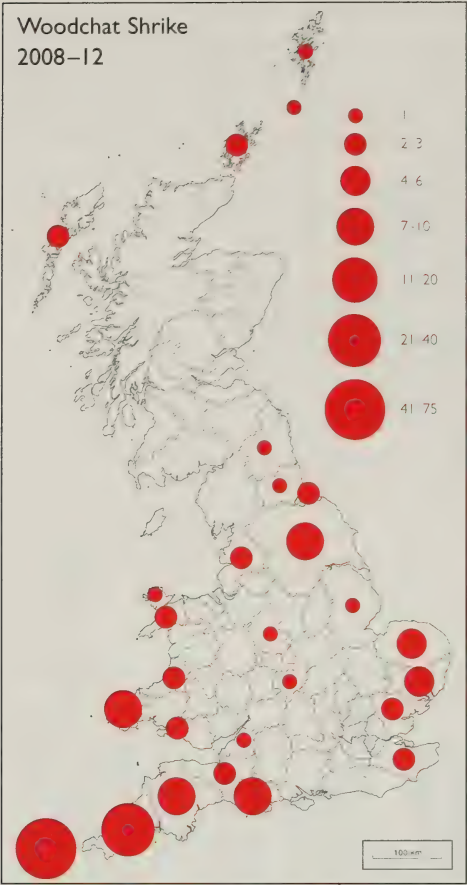


Fig. 3. Distribution of Woodchat Shrikes *Lanius senator* in Britain, 2008–12.

It appears that the medium-term trend for this species, which has been relatively stable for 20 years or more, may be in the process of taking an upturn, but the record total of 55 in 2011 (50% more than the previous highest total) undoubtedly exaggerates this (fig. 2).

Unsurprisingly, given their very different breeding and wintering ranges, Woodchat Shrike has a quite different pattern of occurrence from Red-backed Shrike in terms of both distribution (fig. 3) and timing. It is primarily a spring migrant: 64 were recorded during April to June in the two years, 25 reported as males and 15 as females. There were just four in Scotland, all in the Northern Isles, but ten in Wales (nine of them in 2011, when they outnumbered Red-backed Shrikes). The 41 in southwest England comprised the highest regional total, which included 25 on Scilly.

Just 19 were seen in autumn, 12 of them on Scilly, one in Wales and none in Scotland, with one at South Shields (Co. Durham) being the farthest north. Of the autumn birds, ten were aged as juveniles, two as first-summers and one as an adult.

(Breeds NW Africa & Mediterranean Europe N to C France & S Germany, E through S Turkey to W Iran & S to Israel. Winters in N & C equatorial Africa.)

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
806	25 (8)	18 (16)	1996/45/1	1994/39/2	Stable	Low

Annual means 1958–2012
1958–59 4
1960–69 5
1970–79 11
1980–89 13
1990–99 27
2000–09 17
2010–12 22

Short-toed Lark numbers have been among the most consistent of any species in these reports for more than 20 years. A small decline in the first seven years of the present century appears to have been reversed more recently.

Birds were recorded in 15 areas although, as usual, Scilly predominated with 15. The largest numbers elsewhere were four on Fair Isle, in Devon and in Norfolk. In

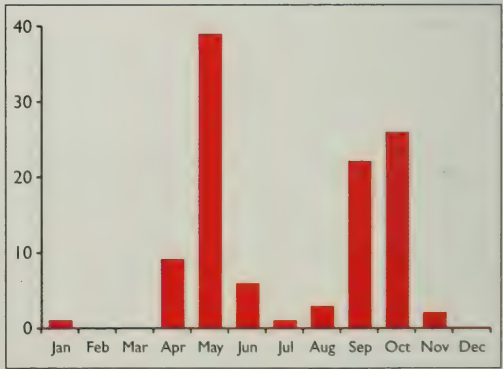


Fig. 4. Arrival dates of Short-toed Larks *Calandrella brachydactyla* in Britain by month, 2008–12.

2011 and 2012 rather more were seen in spring (27) than in autumn (16; fig. 4). There was a typical bias towards southwest England in spring, but numbers in autumn divided more evenly between the southwest and the Northern Isles. There were three west-coast records to the north of Devon, in Ceredigion, Lancashire & N Merseyside and Argyll.

The earliest in spring was on 3rd–11th April 2011 at Portland (Dorset) and the last of the autumn was on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 1st November 2011. None wintered.

(Breeds NW Africa & European Mediterranean basin to Black Sea region of Turkey & S Russia, E through C Asia to Mongolia & NW China. Winters along S edge of Sahara from Senegal to Sudan, Arabian Peninsula & N Indian subcontinent.)

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
809	59 (3)	68 (1)	1987/61/2	2009/57/4	Large increase	High

Annual means 1958–2012
<u>1958–59</u> 1
<u>1960–69</u> 2
<u>1970–79</u> 4
<u>1980–89</u> 12
<u>1990–99</u> 15
<u>2000–09</u> 31
<u>2010–12</u> 56

Two more productive years, including a record total in 2012 that cemented the upward trend, annual averages currently being almost four times higher than during the 1990s.

Red-rumped Swallows were seen in 26 recording areas, almost a third of the total, although sightings were concentrated along the English east coast between Kent and Yorkshire (51 records, 21 of them in Yorkshire), while another 24 were seen in southwest England. There were four records in Wales and ten in Scotland, which included the first British record of the subspecies *daurica/japonica*, on Sanday (Orkney) on 9th June 2011, with the same individual seen later that month on Skye (Highland) on 17th and 29th (Thorne & Thorne 2014). Five turned up in landlocked English counties: two in Derbyshire and singles in Greater London, Oxfordshire and Surrey.

Of the 127 occurrences, 100 arrived in spring and 27 in autumn, with 60% of all records in May, which is now a well-established pattern. The earliest was at Lizard Village (Cornwall) on 2nd April 2011 and the latest at Sheringham (Norfolk) on 17th November 2011.

(Widespread breeder in NW Africa & Mediterranean Europe N to S France & E through Balkans & Greece to W & S Turkey, Middle East & C Asia. Wintering area assumed to lie in N equatorial Africa.)



Ben Green

The Asian Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica daurica/japonica* on Skye, Highland, June 2011.

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
582	14 (15)	20 (9)	2005/47/1	2007/42/2	Increase	Moderate

Annual means 1958–2012
1958–59
1
1960–69
2
1970–79
6
1980–89
9
1990–99
14
2000–09
22
2010–12
17



Stef McElwee

116. Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*, Newbiggin, Northumberland, August 2011.

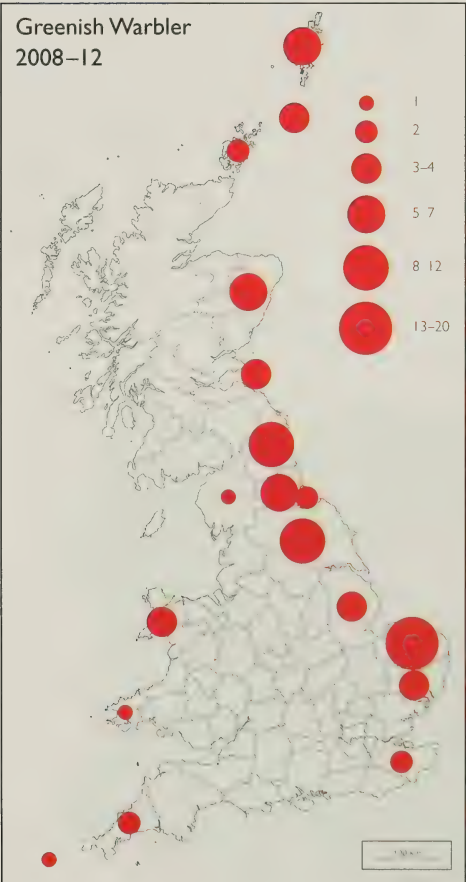


Fig. 5. Distribution of Greenish Warblers *Phylloscopus trochiloides* in Britain, 2008–12.

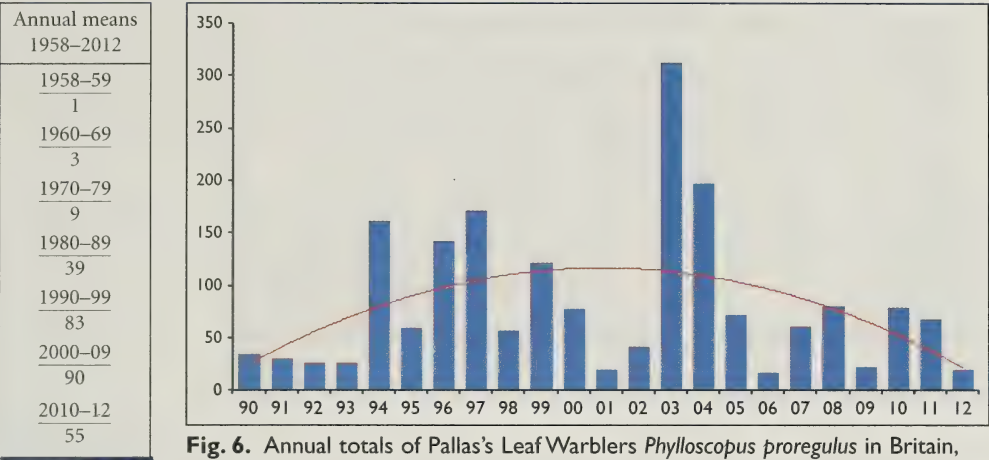
Neither of the years under consideration was exceptional, with the number of records since 2008 being similar to those of the 1990s. Greenish Warbler remains a major rarity in most parts of Britain. Birds were recorded in just 14 areas during 2011–12; Norfolk and Yorkshire were the top counties with seven records each, followed by Northumberland and Shetland with four. The predominantly east-coast distribution of recent years is entirely typical (fig. 5).

Occurrences of singing males that remain for a day or more in spring appear to be slowly increasing, with nine reported in May and June. These included two on Bardsey (Caernarfonshire) and two in Suffolk, with the earliest on 25th May. Autumn records fell between 15th August and 30th September, with 20 of the 25 in the last week of August. This typically early and concentrated showing contrasts with the far wider spread of autumn dates of Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*. The latter has a largely similar breeding and wintering range but, unlike Greenish Warbler, migrates in large numbers along the western shore of the Black Sea, while Greenish presumably takes a more northerly route.

(In Europe breeds E Germany to S Finland, E through Russia to Yenisey River & S through NW Mongolia to N Afghanistan & NW Himalayas. Winters throughout Indian subcontinent.)

Pallas’s Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
2,409	68 (12)	19 (29)	2003/313/1	2004/197/2	Declining after increase	Very high



The high annual totals in the 1990s and early 2000s seem to be a thing of the past, and recent totals have not reached 100 in any year since 2004; since 1990, only the 2006 total has been lower than the 19 in 2012 (fig. 6).

The British distribution of Pallas’s Leaf Warbler is overwhelmingly eastern, similar to that of Greenish Warbler but slightly more wide-ranging. Twelve in Norfolk and ten in Yorkshire were the only double-figure county totals during 2011–12, ahead of nine in Kent and eight in Sussex. Scotland’s tally was just nine, while four were recorded in Wales.

None was seen in winter or spring and virtually the whole passage in both years was compressed into a four-week period from mid October to mid November.

The only multiple record involved two at Prawle (Devon) on 5th November 2012, and most were seen on one day only, the longest-stayer being at Flamborough (Yorkshire) from 15th to 21st October 2012.

(Breeds S Siberia from Baikal region E to Ussuriland, NE China & S to N Mongolia. Winters E China to S of Yangtze River & throughout Indochina S to C Thailand.)

Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*

Total 1968–2012	No. 2011 (rank/45)	No. 2012 (rank/45)	Other annual maxima 1968–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
17,952	1,114 (3)	1,110 (4)	2005/1,469/1	2008/1,446/2	Large increase	Moderate

Given the numbers involved, it is becoming increasingly difficult to compile accurate statistics for Yellow-browed Warblers in Britain. Thankfully, many counties, particularly those recording the most birds, now provide monthly estimates, which makes the task of compiling these statistics easier and gives greater confidence that the figures are reasonably accurate. The two years in consideration here were two more when the annual total exceeded 1,000 individuals, which has been the case now in five years since 2000, although the rapid increase since 2005 is perhaps levelling out.

Yellow-browed Warblers were recorded in 55 areas in 2011–12, over 70% of the national total and once again the second-widest distribution of any passerine in these reports. Six areas

Annual means 1968–2009
<u>1968–69</u>
50
<u>1970–79</u>
76
<u>1980–89</u>
322
<u>1990–99</u>
328
<u>2000–09</u>
749
<u>2010–12</u>
1,032

recorded more than 100 over the two years: Shetland with a whopping 499, Scilly with 284, Norfolk 224, Orkney 178, Yorkshire 150 and Cornwall 122. The highest west-coast totals north of Devon were 20 in the Outer Hebrides and Caernarfonshire, while ten in Lancashire & N Merseyside was the highest in northwest England. Birds were recorded in eight inland English counties: Berkshire, Cambridgeshire, Greater London, Greater Manchester, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Surrey and Worcestershire.

There were winter (December to February) records of at least 27 birds, almost all in southwest England, although two were in Caernarfonshire and singles in Orkney, Norfolk and Suffolk, plus one in Worcestershire for six weeks in March and April 2012. Four others were seen in spring, all in 2012: two in Norfolk (on 30th April to 1st May and 8th May), and singles on Scilly on 26th April and in Yorkshire on 3rd May.

The earliest autumn record was on 13th September 2011 in Shetland but the main influx began around ten days later in both years with 998 recorded in September, 1,054 in October and 124 in November.

(Breeds Russia from Urals to NE Siberia, S to N Mongolia & NE China. Winters NE India, S China, Indochina & Malay Peninsula S to Singapore.)

Radde’s Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
364	7 (19=)	7 (19=)	2000/31/1 1991/25/2	Stable	High

Annual means 1958–2012
<u>1958–59</u>
0
<u>1960–69</u>
1
<u>1970–79</u>
2
<u>1980–89</u>
6
<u>1990–99</u>
10
<u>2000–09</u>
14
<u>2010–12</u>
10

After three reasonable years during 2008–10, the two low totals in 2011 and 2012 were disappointing. All the records are listed here, all of single birds:

- 2011 14th October, Out Newton (Yorkshire)
 14th October, Waxham (Norfolk)
 14th–17th October, Eccles (Norfolk)
 15th October, St Mary’s (Scilly)
 15th–18th October, St Mary’s
 15th–18th October, Weybourne (Norfolk)
 25th–27th October, St Agnes (Scilly)
- 2012 11th October, Spurn (Yorkshire)
 14th October, Bardsey (Caernarfonshire)
 18th–21st October, Lunan Bay (Angus & Dundee)
 18th–21st October, Kilminning (Fife)
 22nd–25th October, Farne Islands (Northumberland)
 22nd–23rd October, St Agnes
 30th October, Hollesley Marshes (Suffolk)

(Breeds S Siberia from Ob River region E to Ussuriland & NE China. Migrates through E China to winter N Burma & Indochina S to C Thailand.)

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*

The record total of 36 Dusky Warblers in 2011, almost a third higher than the two previous best years of 2001 and 2003 (fig. 7), followed a series of poor years. As is often the case, there was little evidence of correlation between the fortunes of this species and the closely related Radde’s Warbler (see above), both of which were removed from the BBRC list at the end of 2005.

Dusky Warbler remains a rare bird in most of Britain, however, and although it was recorded in 16 areas during 2011–12, that was nine more than in 2008–10. None was recorded in the west to

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
408	36 (1)	15 (10)	2001/26/2	2003/25/3	Stable	High

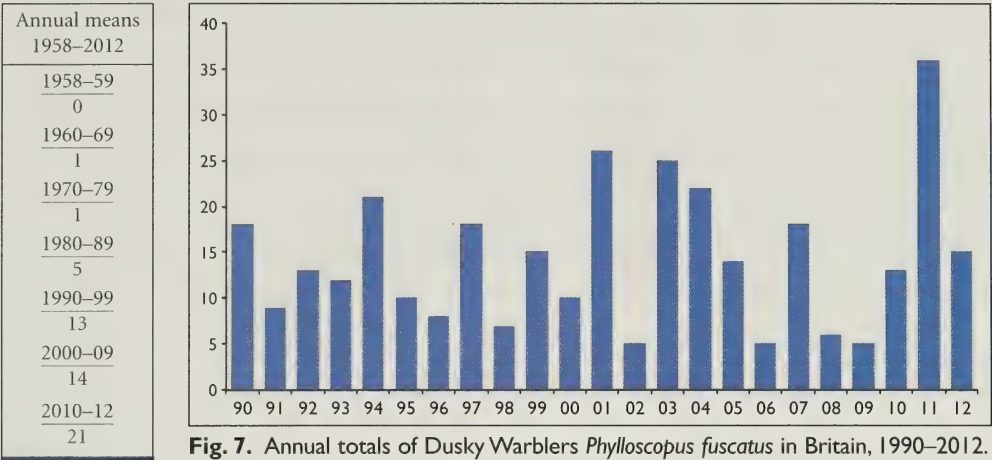


Fig. 7. Annual totals of Dusky Warblers *Phylloscopus fuscatus* in Britain, 1990–2012.

the north of Devon and the highest numbers were on Scilly (seven) and Shetland (six), with five in Norfolk, Yorkshire and Cornwall, four in Suffolk and Dorset, and three in Northumberland.

There was a single spring record, at Holkham (Norfolk) on 2nd May 2011, and the earliest autumn record came on 30th September 2012. Seventeen were seen during October and 31 in November, while the single wintering record was on St Mary’s (Scilly) from mid November 2011 until 12th February 2012.

(Breeds Siberia from Ob River N to c. 60°N, E to Sea of Okhotsk, S to Russian Altai, N Mongolia & Ussuriland through NE China. Winters Nepal to S China & SE Asia to Singapore.)

‘Siberian Chiffchaff’ *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*

Records of Siberian Chiffchaffs have now been collated for five years and some patterns are beginning to emerge. In that five-year period, the numbers reported each year have been as follows: 125 in 2008, 86 in 2009, 112 in 2010, 89 in 2011 and 145 in 2012. Birds have been recorded in 40 areas but have been heavily concentrated in the Northern Isles (which account for



Roger Riddington

117. ‘Siberian Chiffchaff’ *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*, Sumburgh, Shetland, November 2011.

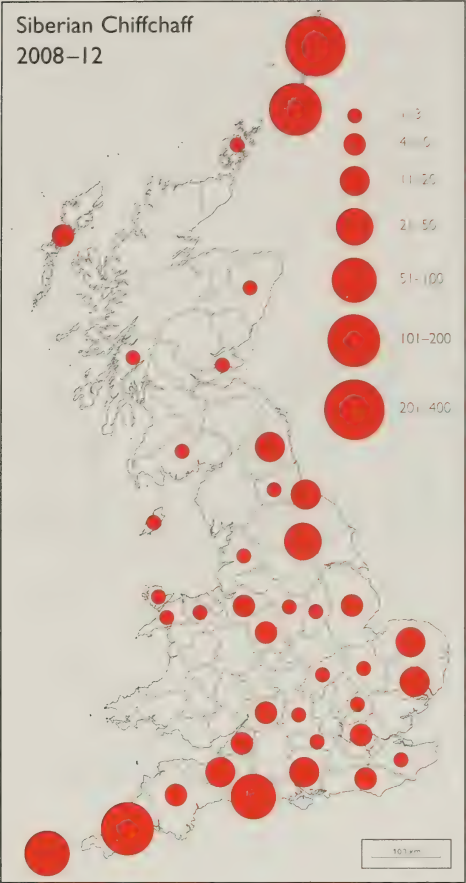


Fig. 8. Distribution of ‘Siberian Chiffchaffs’ *Phylloscopus collybita tristis* in Britain, 2008–12.

(Breeds Russia from Urals E to NE Siberia & S to N Mongolia. Winters Iran to N Indian subcontinent.)

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*

Total 1968–2012	No. 2011 (rank/45)	No. 2012 (rank/45)	Other annual maxima 1968–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
6,936	211 (7)	245 (3)	2010/398/1 2002/297/2	Increasing	Moderate

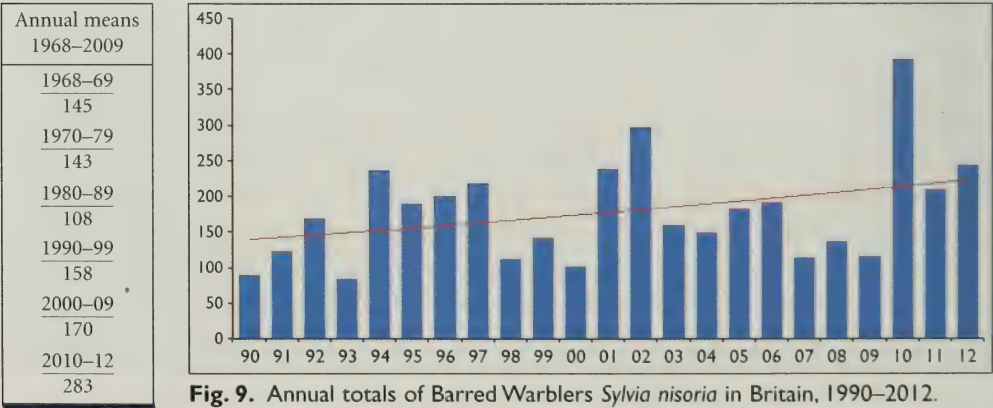


Fig. 9. Annual totals of Barred Warblers *Sylvia nisoria* in Britain, 1990–2012.

almost 40% of records, mostly in Shetland and Fair Isle) and in southwest England (which accounts for a further 30%; fig. 8). Although records are published in some areas (notably in the Northern Isles) solely on the basis of plumage features and without supporting vocalisations, it is clear that key features are generally scrutinised carefully and that records are being judged nationally to increasingly uniform standards.

Siberian Chiffchaffs are primarily late-autumn passage migrants, with most of those in the Northern Isles and along the east coast arriving from early October to mid November, after which they become much rarer in those areas, particularly in the Northern Isles. Farther south and west, numbers increase into November and rather more are seen during winter.

The typical winter range of this form extends from southern Iraq, east to India and Bangladesh (Clement 2006), so the pattern of records suggests that southern England, and perhaps other regions in southern Europe, is becoming an alternative wintering area for some individuals, as is the case for Richard’s Pipit *Anthus richardi* and perhaps Yellow-browed Warbler. The phenomenon of increasing numbers of Common Chiffchaffs wintering in Britain has been noted for many years but just how many of them are *tristis* is only now beginning to become clear.

Two more productive years confirmed the continuing increase in records over the past 20 years or so (fig. 9).

As usual, the Northern Isles were responsible for the majority (69%) of records, including 161 in Shetland, 92 in Orkney and 53 on Fair Isle. Birds were recorded in another 31 areas, the best totals being 22 in Yorkshire, 19 in Norfolk, 15 in Northumberland and 12 in North-east Scotland. Together, the Northern Isles and the east coast accounted for 402 of the 456 birds seen. Just seven were found in Wales and three records came from inland English counties: Greater London, Hertfordshire and Worcestershire.

There were no spring records and the earliest autumn bird was on 6th August. A further 220+ were recorded during August, 140+ in September, 53 in October and seven in November up to the 16th (note that 35 on North Ronaldsay, Orkney, in August/September were not attributed to month). Age was reported for just a few birds and only one was identified as an adult, on North Ronaldsay on 16th October 2012. There are only three other records of autumn adults on our database – in Caithness in November 1975, and in Northumberland in September 1983 and September 1986 – together with one found dead in Hampshire on 20th October 1943 that had been ringed in Italy in July that year (Robinson & Clark 2014).

(Breeds C & E Europe N to S Finland & S to S Black Sea, Russia E to Yenisey River region of Siberia, & N Kazakhstan. Winters NE equatorial Africa.)

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
673	27 (6)	16 (17)	1995/37/1	2008/33/2	Stable	Low

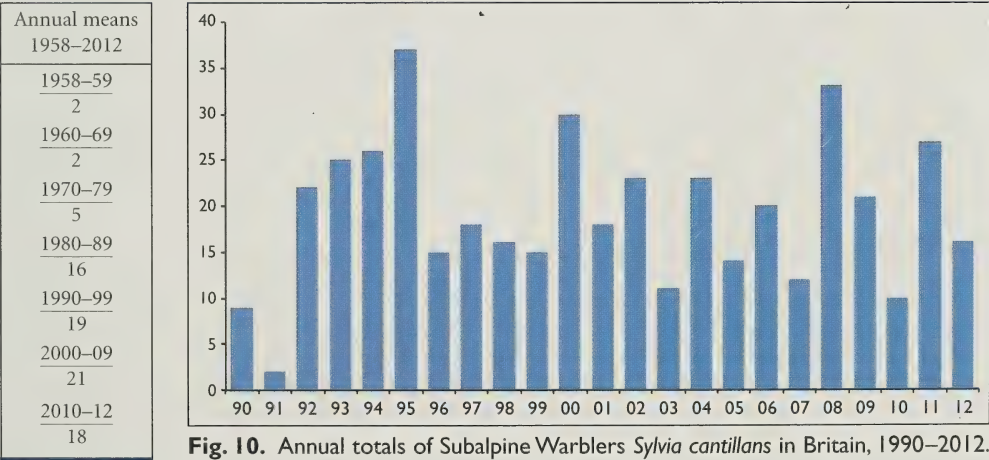


Fig. 10. Annual totals of Subalpine Warblers *Sylvia cantillans* in Britain, 1990–2012.

The taxonomy of the Subalpine Warblers is in a state of flux. Svensson (2013) proposed splitting the complex into three species, but so far BOURC has recognised only two species (Sangster *et al.* 2015), Subalpine Warbler *S. cantillans* and Moltoni’s Warbler *S. subalpina*. Until the end of 2014, records of ‘Eastern Subalpine Warbler’ *S. c. albistriata* were dealt with by BBRC while ‘Western Subalpine Warbler’ *S. c. cantillans* was treated as a scarce migrant, but from 1st January 2015, all forms of the complex will be considered by BBRC (Stoddart 2014). Subalpine Warbler *sensu lato* (all forms, including *S. subalpina*) will continue to appear in these reports, at least until that for 2015.

During 2011–12, ten birds were identified as Eastern Subalpine Warbler, of which seven have been accepted by BBRC; three others have not yet been assessed but are included here, as are 19 others where no subspecies identity was assigned. Fourteen were claimed as Western Subalpine Warbler and there were no records of Moltoni’s Warbler during the two years 2011–12.

At no time since 1986 has the most recent ten-year mean of all Subalpine Warblers fallen below

Richard Stonier



118. Female Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*, St Agnes, Scilly, October 2011.

ten; it has varied between 15.5 and 22.3 since 1990 and currently stands at 18.7. Annual totals have shown a slightly increasing trend between 1990 and 2000, followed by a small decline since, but the changes are not statistically significant (fig. 10). Treating all the forms together, Subalpine Warbler *sensu lato* is clearly a scarce migrant rather than a national rarity.

BBRC’s work to assess all forms from 2015 onwards will hopefully clarify the status of each.

During the two years, a total of 20 was recorded in Scotland, notably ten in Shetland and three on Fair Isle, including an unaccompanied male Eastern that held territory on the island from 29th April to 4th June 2011. Just two were seen in Wales, both on Bardsey (Caernarfonshire). The remaining records came from English coastal counties between Northumberland and Scilly. The earliest was at Eccles (Norfolk) on 28th March 2012; 18 followed in April, 17 in May and one in June. The first of six autumn migrants, all in southern England, was at Holland Haven (Essex) from 14th to 20th August 2011; four arrived in October, and the latest was a first-winter female at St Just (Cornwall) from 17th November 2012 into 2013.

(Breeds NW Africa & Mediterranean basin from Portugal E to W Turkey, N to S France. Winters along S edge of Sahara from Senegal to Sudan.) Race *albigriata* breeds SE Europe from Slovenia & Croatia S to Greece, Aegean Islands, Crete & W Turkey. Migrates through Middle East to winter along S edge of Sahara S to Sudan.)

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*

Total 1968–2012	No. 2011 (rank/45)	No. 2012 (rank/45)	Other annual maxima 1968–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
4,576	47 (43)	97 (18)	1997/286/1	1992/281/2	Stable	Moderate

Annual means 1968–2009
1968–69 35
1970–79 81
1980–89 104
1990–99 139 *
2000–09 88
2010–12 79

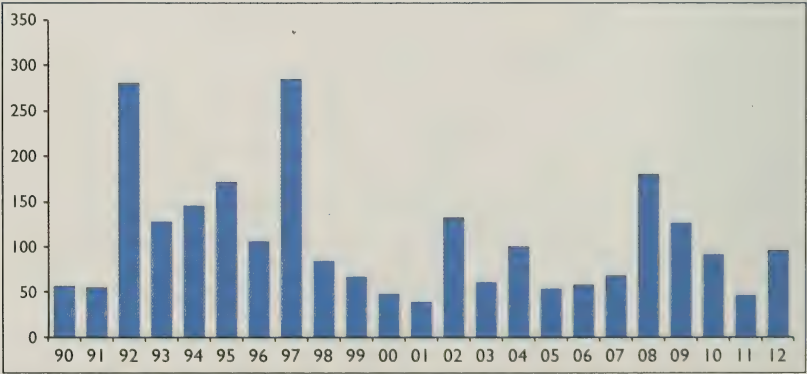


Fig. 11. Annual totals of Icterine Warblers *Hippolais icterina* in Britain, 1990–2012.

Although the 2011 total was the third-lowest ever, it appears that the post-1997 decline has now more or less flattened out (fig. 11).

Roughly equal numbers were seen in spring and autumn. The earliest was on 8th May 2012 on Holy Island (Northumberland) and birds continued to arrive until mid June. The Northern Isles dominated in spring, with 52 of the 79 records (66%), including a peak of ten on Fair Isle on 23rd May 2012. Only a handful reached the southwest – six on Scilly and one in Dorset – while one in Cambridge on 23rd May 2012 was the only sighting in an inland county.

Autumn passage began in mid August and was mostly spent by the end of that month with just eight in September, the latest on 26th. The distribution pattern was significantly different from that in spring, with around 40% recorded in the Northern Isles and a similar proportion along the east coast of England, compared with none in the southwest.

Three were seen in Wales, all on Bardsey (Caernarfonshire) during August 2011, and one reached the Outer Hebrides in May 2012. A first-winter on Scilly, at Porth Mellon, St Mary's, on 9th February 2012 was, as far as we are aware, the first-ever winter record in Britain.

(Breeds W & C Europe N to NW Norway & E to Black Sea, European Russia & Siberia E to region of Ob River, & N Kazakhstan. Winters throughout Africa S of equator.)

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*

Total 1968–2012	No. 2011 (rank/45)	No. 2012 (rank/45)	Other annual maxima 1968–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
1,344	32 (18)	23 (28)	1981/60/1	1996/59/2	Stable	Low

Annual means 1968–2009
1968–69 15
1970–79 32
1980–89 39
1990–99 30
2000–09 23
2010–12 23

Although numbers have declined slightly from the early 1990s, this trend now appears to be stabilising, and the 2011 total was slightly higher than the medium-term average while that of 2012 was a close match.

In the period, nine were recorded in May and June, and 46 in autumn (late July to early November), mostly in August and September.

The pattern of occurrences differs radically from that of

Icterine Warbler, in both timing and location, which is not surprising in view of their differing ranges and migration routes: from southwest Europe to West Africa for Melodious, and from north and northeast Europe to East Africa for Icterine. There were 29 records in southwest England, accounting for more than half of the national total, and 11 in Wales, including six on Bardsey (Caernarfonshire) and four on Skokholm (Pembrokeshire; fig. 12). Just three reached Scotland, two on Fair Isle and one on Coll (Argyll). Less expected were singles on the Isle of Man, in Greater London and in Cumbria.

(Breeds NW Africa & SW Europe from S Spain to SE Netherlands & E to Italy. Winters W Africa N of equator.)

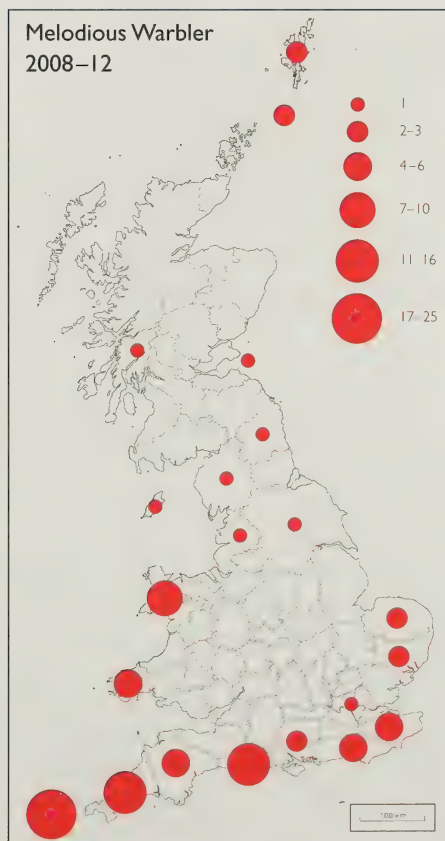


Fig. 12. Distribution of Melodious Warblers *Hippolais polyglotta* in Britain, 2008–12.

Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
1,314	8 (46)	11 (40)	1976/102/1	1991/62/2	Declining	Low

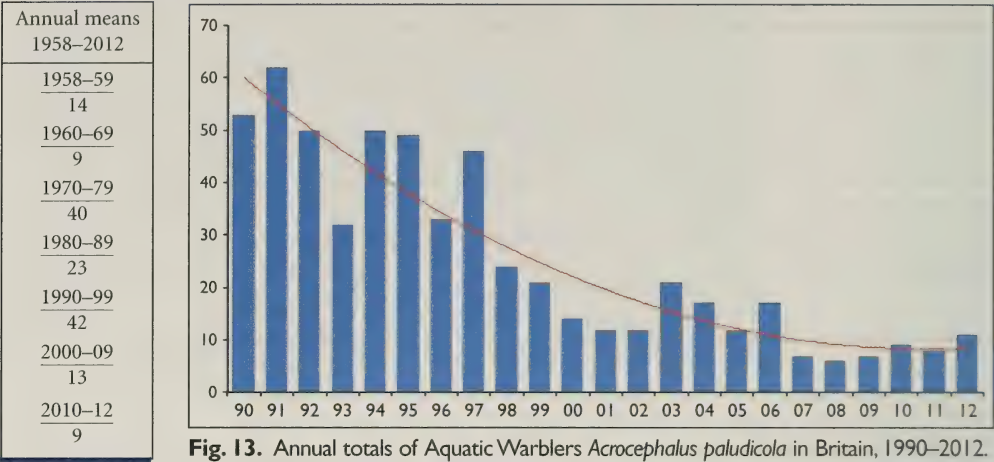


Fig. 13. Annual totals of Aquatic Warblers *Acrocephalus paludicola* in Britain, 1990–2012.

Despite an increase in targeted ringing efforts, numbers of Aquatic Warblers in Britain have fallen by around 80% since 1990 with 2011–12 adding to this downward trend, and contributing to a mean of 11.5 per year for the most recent ten-year period (fig. 13).

Of the 19 records in 2011–12, 12 were trapped by ringers. Indeed, with only seven field records over two years and all but three birds being seen for one day only, the chances of encountering an Aquatic Warbler are becoming increasingly slim.

All records were in autumn, predominantly in the second half of August (see below). The outstanding record was one at Red Rocks (Cheshire & Wirral) on 19th–20th August 2012, the first in the county for 35 years.

- 2011 26th July, trapped, Hardham (Sussex)
17th August, Exminster Marshes (Devon)
20th August, trapped, Lytchett Bay (Dorset)
22nd August, trapped, Marazion (Cornwall)
23rd August, trapped, Marazion
3rd September, trapped, South Milton Ley (Devon)
8th–14th September, Big Pool, St Agnes (Scilly)
28th September, Big Pool, St Agnes



Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*.

Ray Scally

- 2012 12th August, trapped, Marazion Marsh
 12th August, trapped, Portland (Dorset)
 18th August, two birds, both trapped, Lytchett Bay
 18th August, trapped, site undisclosed (Dorset)
 19th–20th August, Red Rocks (Cheshire & Wirral)
 21st August, Steart Point (Somerset)
 23rd August, trapped, Gunwalloe (Cornwall)
 23rd August, Lorton Meadows, Weymouth (Dorset)
 7th September, trapped, site undisclosed (Dorset)
 25th–28th September, Porthloo Duck Pond, St Mary's (Scilly)

(Breeds locally NE Germany, Poland, Belarus & Russia E to S Urals, with isolated population in Hungary. Winters in N tropics of W Africa.)

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*

Total 1986–2012	No. 2011 (rank/27)	No. 2012 (rank/27)	Other annual maxima 1986–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
1,231	28 (21)	52 (6)	1992/106/1 2008/105/2	Stable	Moderate

Annual means 1986–2012
<u>1986–89</u> 30
<u>1990–99</u> 53
<u>2000–09</u> 46
<u>2010–12</u> 41

There is always an element of subjectivity in dealing with singing males – in terms of deciding whether attempted breeding is a possibility – but those present for just a day or two plus those known definitely not to have found a mate are included here as migrants.

After two good years in 2008 and 2009, numbers in 2011–12 were unspectacular. As usual, most were in spring, the earliest at Scarborough (Yorkshire) on 23rd May 2012. Of the 13 autumn birds, six were found in the Northern Isles, three in Kent and singles on the Isle of Man, in Norfolk and Northumberland, before the latest on St Agnes, Scilly, on 21st–24th October 2012.

The European breeding grounds are generally vacated in August and early September with juveniles departing two weeks later than adults on average (Dyrce 2006). Late autumn occurrences should therefore be considered carefully, though they certainly do happen and may reflect an origin in the more eastern portions of the range.

(Breeds temperate Europe from France to C Finland, E to Caucasus & NE Turkey, Russia & Siberia E to Ob River. Winters equatorial and SE Africa.)

Rose-coloured Starling *Pastor roseus*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
1,035	51 (5)	47 (6)	2002/195/1 2001 & 2003/67/2=	Increasing	Very high

Two more good years, the fifth and sixth highest on record. The exceptional influx of 2002 inflated the 2000–09 average, yet even setting that year aside it is clear that numbers increased at the turn of the century but have remained roughly stable more recently (fig. 14).

Two juveniles were seen at Northrepps (Norfolk) on 17th November 2012 but all other records were of single birds. They showed a typically widespread distribution, being recorded in 35 areas during 2011–12. Even though southwest England and the Northern Isles between them accounted for half of all records, this species has one of the least concentrated distributions of all the scarce migrants (fig. 15).

There were six winter (December to February) records, two in Cornwall and singles in Ayrshire, Devon, Hampshire and Scilly. Four were seen in May, 28 in June, nine in July and five

Annual means 1958–2012	
1958–59	6
1960–69	3
1970–79	6
1980–89	8
1990–99	18
2000–09	56
2010–12	40

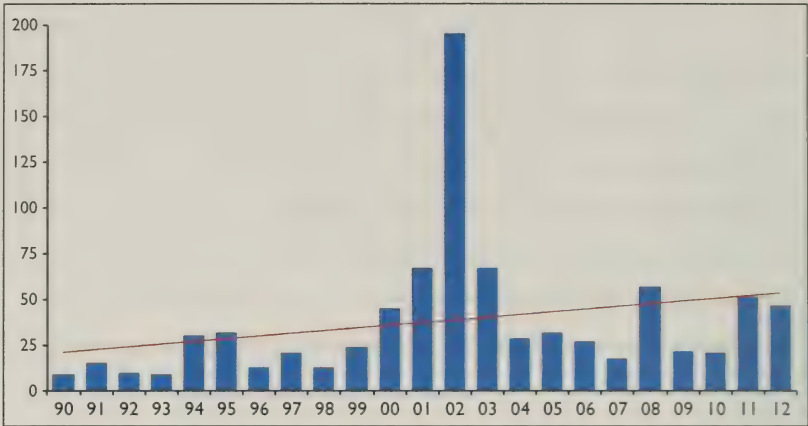


Fig. 14. Annual totals of Rose-coloured Starlings *Pastor roseus* in Britain, 1990–2012.

in August, but most of the 60 autumn records were in September to November, 40 of them aged as juveniles – the earliest of which was found on 20th September 2012.

Records of Rose-coloured Starlings fall into three broad categories. Spring records are best accounted for as overshoots (although a few records before May are perhaps more likely to be migrating individuals that have wintered successfully in western Europe). Summer records are probably adults undertaking post-breeding nomadic wandering, a phenomenon for which this species is noted, perhaps as failed breeders dispersing prematurely from colonies. The overwhelming majority of birds later in autumn are juveniles and thus most probably disorientated migrants, some of which remain for the winter. Rose-coloured Starlings have a particular tendency to far-flung vagrancy and have reached,

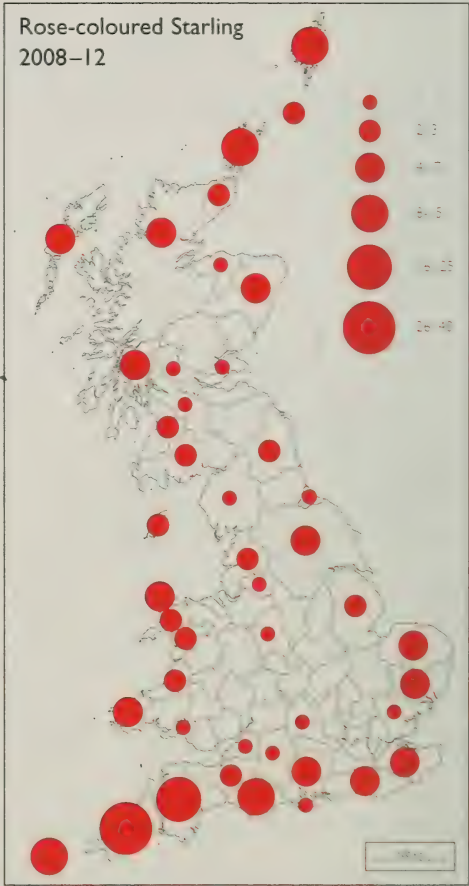


Fig. 15. Distribution of Rose-coloured Starlings *Pastor roseus* in Britain, 2008–12.



119. Juvenile Rose-coloured Starling *Pastor roseus*, St Mary's, Scilly, October 2012.

Simon Knight

for example, sub-Saharan Africa, eastern China and southeast Asia (Craig *et al.* 2013). (Breeds locally along Black Sea coasts of Romania, S Ukraine and Turkey, E through steppe region of C Asia to E Kazakhstan. Winters Indian subcontinent S to Sri Lanka, and SE Arabian Peninsula.)

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*

Total 1968–2012	No. 2011 (rank/45)	No. 2012 (rank/45)	Other annual maxima 1968–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
5,208	41 (44)	63 (34)	1985/622/1	1981/333/2	Declining	Moderate

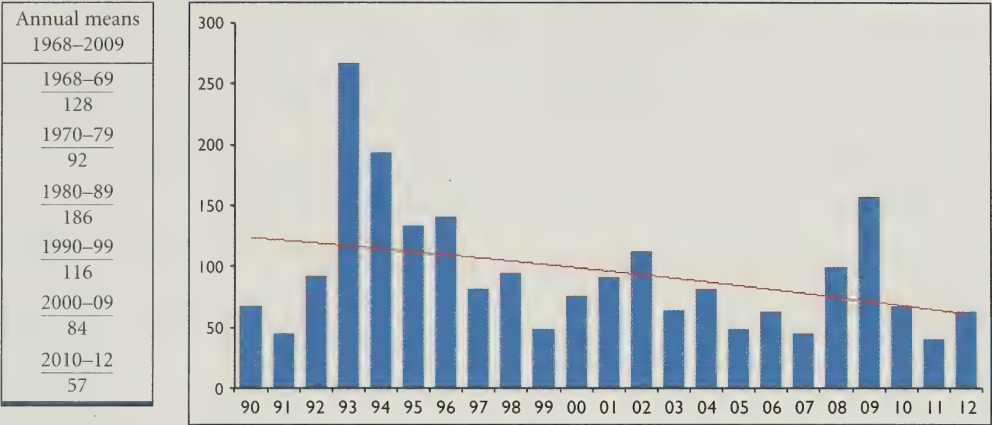


Fig. 16. Annual totals of Bluethroats *Luscinia svecica* in Britain, 1990–2012.

Two more very poor totals, with the second-lowest ever in 2011, contributing to a current ten-year mean of 73, less than half that of the 1980s and signposting a further significant decline (fig. 16). This contrasts with the assessment that the population is stable across its European breeding range, including Fennoscandia (www.birdlife.org).

Across the two years, 59 were seen in spring, comprising 33 males, 19 females and seven for which the sex was not reported. Seven of the 33 males were reported as white-spotted, all of them in England, north to Northumberland. As expected, these were early arrivals, the earliest being on 20th March 2011 in both Suffolk and Yorkshire, while the latest passage bird was seen on 27th April of the same year. Most were located in or near to wetland habitats. Most intriguing was one at Ouse



Richard Stonier

120. Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*, St Mary's, Scilly, October 2011.

Fen (Cambridgeshire) on 10th June 2011, which was thought possibly to have been the same individual present at nearby Welney (Norfolk) from 23rd April to 17th August 2010 and which established a territory. Another white-spotted male, trapped at East Chevington (Northumberland) on 27th July and retrapped there on 1st September, was also perhaps a potential breeding bird.

Only 11 of the remaining 28 spring males were reported specifically as ‘Red-spotted Bluethroats’, but in reality it is likely that most, if not all, were red-spotted. The distribution of these birds was heavily weighted towards northeastern Britain, in marked contrast to the more southeasterly bias to white-spotted birds. The earliest definite red-spotted male was at Port Henderson (Highland) on the exceptionally early date of 12th April 2011; the previous earliest date in our database is 11th May 2004 in Cleveland. No more were seen until 2nd May (on Fair Isle in 2012) and the latest was on 8th June.

Return passage was light with just 45 birds. The earliest appeared in late August but most were seen during September and October, with the latest in mid November 2011. Most were in Scotland, where 30 were recorded, with the remainder restricted to just eight English counties, including six on Scilly and none in Wales, and singles inland in Leicestershire & Rutland, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire.

(Red-spotted races breed from Scandinavia E across Russia to extreme W Alaska, & S to C Asia. White-spotted races breed C & S Europe. Winters Mediterranean basin, Sahel region of Africa, Arabian Peninsula, Indian subcontinent, S China & SE Asia.)

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*

Total 1968–2012	No. 2011 (rank/45)	No. 2012 (rank/45)	Other annual maxima 1968–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
4,157	30 (45)	133 (5)	1984/196/1	1976/174/2	Stable	Low

Annual means 1968–2009
<u>1968–69</u> 59
<u>1970–79</u> 79
<u>1980–89</u> 115
<u>1990–99</u> 88
<u>2000–09</u> 94
<u>2010–12</u> 94

Two years with very mixed fortunes, the lowest total ever in 2011 followed by the third-highest since 1990. Although there have been occasional highs and lows, the number of Red-breasted Flycatchers recorded annually has shown very little change since the 1970s.

This species is typically scarce in spring and only 15 were recorded over the two years, all in May and June and all but one (on Bardsey, Caernarfonshire, on 6th June 2012) in the eastern counties.

Of the 148 autumn migrants, some 53 were seen along the English east coast (including 17 in Yorkshire, 15 in Norfolk and

14 in Northumberland), 53 in Scotland (including 37 in the Northern Isles) and 36 in southwest England, including 28 on Scilly. Limal dates were 15th September and 23rd November. Only three adults were reported, 25 were juveniles or first-winters, and the ages of the remainder were not specified.

(Breeds C Europe from Germany N to S Sweden, C Finland & Russia E to Urals & perhaps beyond, & S to Black Sea & Caucasus. Winters Indian subcontinent.)



Simon Knight

121. Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*, Warham Greens, Norfolk, September 2012.

‘Grey-headed Wagtail’ *Motacilla flava thunbergi*

No. 2011
20
No. 2012
22

These are the two lowest annual totals since record collation began in 2008. Most counties record only the distinctively plumaged males but Fair Isle reported three females and Norfolk two. All but one were in spring; the earliest, at Minsmere (Suffolk) on 28th April 2011, was followed by 36 in May and four in June. The only autumn record was a male at Trethewey (Cornwall) on 20th

September 2011.

All records were in the eastern counties with the exception of singles in the Outer Hebrides and Lancashire & N Merseyside. Norfolk was the top county, with 12, followed by Fair Isle with eight, Shetland six, Suffolk four, Yorkshire three, and singles in nine other counties.

(Breeds from C Scandinavia E across N Russia & N Siberia E to Kolyma River region at least. Species winters NW Africa & throughout sub-Saharan Africa, S & SE Asia & N Australia.)

Richard’s Pipit *Anthus richardi*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
4,381	102 (17)	126 (9)	1994/353/1 2005/200/2	Stable	Low

Annual means 1958–2012
1958–59
6
1960–69
40
1970–79
51
1980–89
65
1990–99
130
2000–09
119
2010–12
105

Although the annual means hint at the possibility of a minor recent decline, annual totals remain remarkably consistent. As expected, the majority of records came from coastal sites, but this is a species that turns up inland moderately regularly and there were records in five landlocked English counties: two in Greater Manchester and singles in Berkshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Wiltshire.

Five were seen in spring (March to May), three in southwest England and two in Norfolk. In autumn, 216 were recorded between

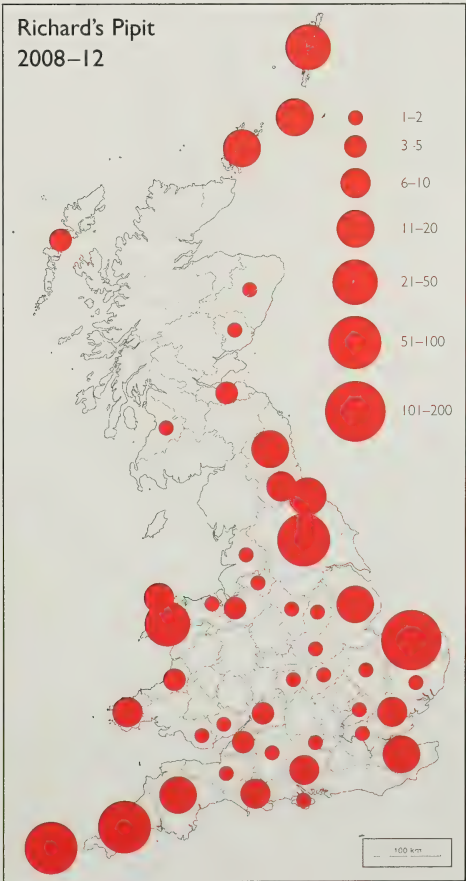


Fig. 17. Distribution of Richard’s Pিপits *Anthus richardi* in Britain, 2008–12.



122. Richard’s Pipit *Anthus richardi*, St Mary’s, Scilly, October 2012.

Richard Stonier

mid September and mid November. The 29 Scottish records were nearly all in the Northern Isles, the exceptions being three in Lothian and one in the Outer Hebrides, while 24 in Wales were divided fairly evenly among Anglesey, Caernarfonshire and Pembrokeshire. The remainder were spread widely across 22 English counties with high totals of 38 in Norfolk, 24 in Yorkshire and 16 in both Cornwall and Scilly (fig. 17).

Wintering birds were present in Anglesey, Cambridgeshire, Cornwall, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, the Outer Hebrides and Dorset, the last county having one that remained from 2nd December 2011 to 8th April 2012. Although the core wintering area lies in India and southeast Asia, a fairly substantial wintering population now exists in the Western Palearctic with wintering flocks of 30 or more now recorded regularly in parts of the Mediterranean basin and North Africa (Tyler 2004).

(Breeds Siberia from Ob River region to Sea of Okhotsk, Mongolia, N & E China. Winters Indian subcontinent, S China & SE Asia, with small numbers locally in NW Africa, Mediterranean basin & Arabian Peninsula.)

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
1,215	15 (33)	7 (48)	1992/57/1	1983/56/2	Large decline	Moderate

Annual means 1958–2012
1958–59 10
1960–69 14
1970–79 27
1980–89 36
1990–99 29
2000–09 11
2010–12 11

Populations in western and central Europe have declined markedly (Tyler & Christie 2012) and this is reflected in the declining numbers of migrants reaching Britain since 2000; the most recent ten-year mean now stands at 11. And while the 15 in 2011 hinted at a small recovery, 2012 reverted back to very low numbers.

Eleven appeared in April and May, with five on Scilly and singles in Anglesey, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Shetland, Suffolk and Yorkshire.

A further 11 occurred in autumn, between mid August and mid October, with two in both Cornwall and Scilly, and singles in Essex, Greater London, Isle of Wight, Norfolk, Orkney, Somerset and Yorkshire.

Thirteen were recorded for one day only and the longest-stayer was at Kilnsea (Yorkshire) on 15th–25th May 2011.

(Breeds NW Africa, S & C Europe N to Estonia, E to NW Mongolia, NW China, N Iran & N Afghanistan. Winters S edge of Sahara from Senegal to Sudan, Arabian Peninsula & NW Indian subcontinent.)



James Hanlon

123. Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*, Landguard, Suffolk, May 2012.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
492	8 (28)	12 (14)	1992/47/1	1995/21/2	Declining	Moderate

Annual means 1958–2012
1958–59 2
1960–69 3
1970–79 7
1980–89 8
1990–99 18
2000–09 9
2010–12 13

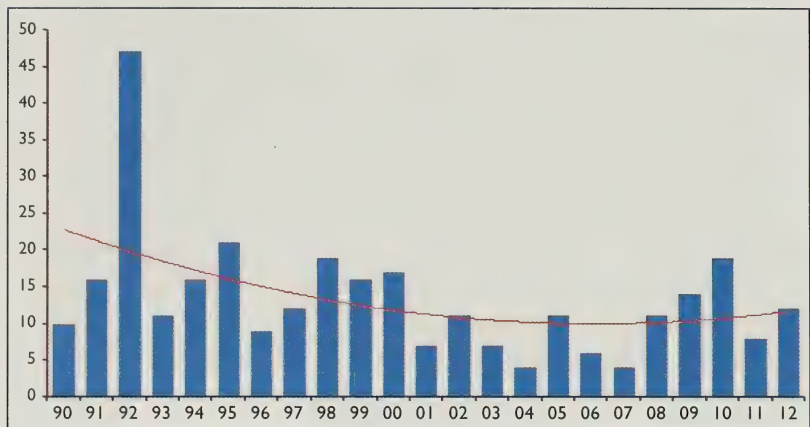


Fig. 18. Annual totals of Red-throated Pipits *Anthus cervinus* in Britain, 1990–2012.

Two more mediocre years continue the pattern of roughly ten records a year since 2000: the annual mean is 9.6 for the most recent ten-year period and 10.6 since the species was removed from the BBRC list in 2006 (fig. 18).

Four were found in spring, between 22nd April and 21st May, and 16 in autumn, from 1st October to 2nd November. Apart from one flying over the Calf of Man on 1st October 2012, all the records were in England. As usual the southwest predominated, with nine on Scilly (including a long-stayer on St Agnes on 14th–28th October 2012) and three in Cornwall. There were also two in Yorkshire, and singles in Avon, Cheshire & Wirral, Devon, Gloucestershire and Herefordshire. The absence of records in Scotland during 2011–12 was unusual.

(Breeds N Norway, Sweden & Finland E to Chukotskiy Peninsula & S to Kamchatka, with small numbers W Alaska. Winters across N & C equatorial Africa, N India, S China & SE Asia.)

Common Rosefinch *Erythrura erythrura*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
4,716	306 (1)	111 (20)	1992/248/2	2010/236/3	Stable	Moderate

The record total in 2011, combined with the third-highest in 2010, boosted the recent average but these two totals stand out from 20 or so years of relative stability (fig. 19).

As usual, distribution was highly concentrated, with 80% of all records in the Northern Isles: 215 in Shetland, 60 in Orkney and 56 on Fair Isle (fig. 20). Away from Scotland, there were 24 in

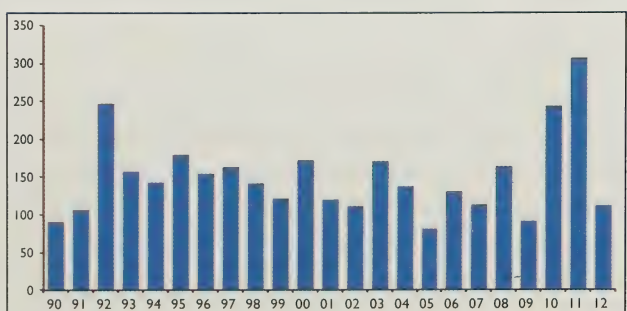


Fig. 19. Annual totals of Common Rosefinches *Erythrura erythrura* in Britain, 1990–2012.

Annual means 1958–2012
<u>1958–59</u>
6
<u>1960–69</u>
11
<u>1970–79</u>
37
<u>1980–89</u>
76
<u>1990–99</u>
151
<u>2000–09</u>
129
<u>2010–12</u>
220

southwest England (including 15 on Scilly), 21 along the English east coast and ten in Wales.

May and June produced 77 records while 340 were seen in autumn, including a record passage of 266 in 2011.

(Breeds N & E Europe, and locally in C Europe and Turkey, E across Russia to NE Siberia & S to Caucasus & Himalayas. Winters from Iran and Indian subcontinent to S China & Indochina.)



Fig. 20. Distribution of Common Rosefinches *Erythrura erythrura* in Britain, 2008–12.



124. Male Common Rosefinch *Erythrura erythrura*, Sumburgh, Shetland, June 2011.

Arctic Redpoll *Acanthis hornemanni*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
936	17 (10)	35 (4)	1996/266/1	1995/195/2	Stable	High

Annual means 1958–2012
<u>1958–59</u>
0
<u>1960–69</u>
2
<u>1970–79</u>
4
<u>1980–89</u>
10
<u>1990–99</u>
60
<u>2000–09</u>
10
<u>2010–12</u>
26

Records of the two subspecies, *A. h. exilipes* (‘Coues’s Arctic Redpoll’) and *A. h. hornemanni* (‘Hornemann’s Arctic Redpoll’) continue to be treated differently, the former by county records committees and the latter by BBRC, but again we deal with both together for the sake of completeness and because some birds are not identified to subspecies. Both subspecies are subject to occasional influxes, the largest being in winter 1995/96 (annual totals of 195 in 1995 and 266 in 1996), when most if not all of the birds were *exilipes*. There is no correlation between annual totals of the two taxa.

Sixteen *exilipes* were recorded in 2011 (along with a bird that was not assigned to subspecies), and a further five in 2012. In terms of timing, one on 14th July 2012 on Fair Isle stood out from the crowd, with the rest being seen in autumn and winter, the latest winter record being a bird on 31st March 2011 at Weybridge (Surrey). Two *exilipes* were recorded in Shetland and one on Fair Isle, while the remainder were all in England, including three in each of Bedfordshire, Lincolnshire and Norfolk.

No records of *hornemanni* were accepted in 2011, but 2012 was a bumper year with 30 seen, thought to be the record total for this subspecies. Singles on Islay (Argyll) in April and on Fair Isle in June were the only records in the early part of the year. The first in autumn arrived in Shetland on 28th September, the first of an unprecedented 18 birds, with 12 on Unst alone, where some birds remained



Robin Chittenden

125. Male 'Coues's Arctic Redpoll' *Acanthis hornemanni exilipes*, Kelling, Norfolk, February 2012.

until the end of the year. Elsewhere in Scotland, there were four in the autumn in Orkney, one on Fair Isle and two in the Outer Hebrides. Singles in Norfolk, Suffolk and Scilly were the only records away from the Scottish islands, emphasising the differences in distribution between the two taxa.

The ten-year mean for *exilipes* currently stands at 5.8 while that for *hornemanni* is 9.6, so both subspecies should perhaps be regarded as rarities, although as a single species Arctic Redpoll remains a scarce migrant (with a ten-year mean of 16.0).

(Circumpolar breeding range at tree line and tundra from N Scandinavia E to Chukotskiy Peninsula in NE Siberia, N Alaska, N Canada & N Greenland. Disperses erratically to S of breeding range in winter, regularly reaching NW Europe. Race *hornemanni* breeds Ellesmere & Baffin Island, Canada, & N Greenland S to Scorsby Sound & disperses erratically to S of breeding range in winter, irregularly reaching NW Europe.)

Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
482	0	1 (11=)	1990/210/1 1982/84/2	n/a	–

Annual means 1958–2012
1958–59 0
1960–69 8
1970–79 1
1980–89 12
1990–99 27
2000–09 0
2010–12 <1

A female at Blackdown Forest (Sussex), from 22nd January to 18th February 2012, was the first away from the restricted Scottish breeding area since 1995.

The pattern of the data for this species is unlike any other in the scarce migrants reports. In the 55 years since the formation of BBRC in 1958 there are zeros in 41 of them! There are double-figure counts in just eight years, often reflecting a major influx in the late autumn of one year and the knock-on effect of new records the following year, often in late winter or during return passage in spring: hence annual totals of 66 in 1962 (and 13 in 1963), 84 in 1982 (and 25 in 1983) and 210 in 1990 (and 54 in 1991). Ten in both 1975 and 1984 are the only other double-digit counts.

(Resident or dispersive throughout N Scotland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia & Russia E to Urals, with distribution closely linked to that of Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris*. Periodically disperses S & W to W Europe where occasionally breeds.)

European Serin *Serinus serinus*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
1,971	34 (29)	40 (21)	1996/99/1	2004/89/2	Declining	Low

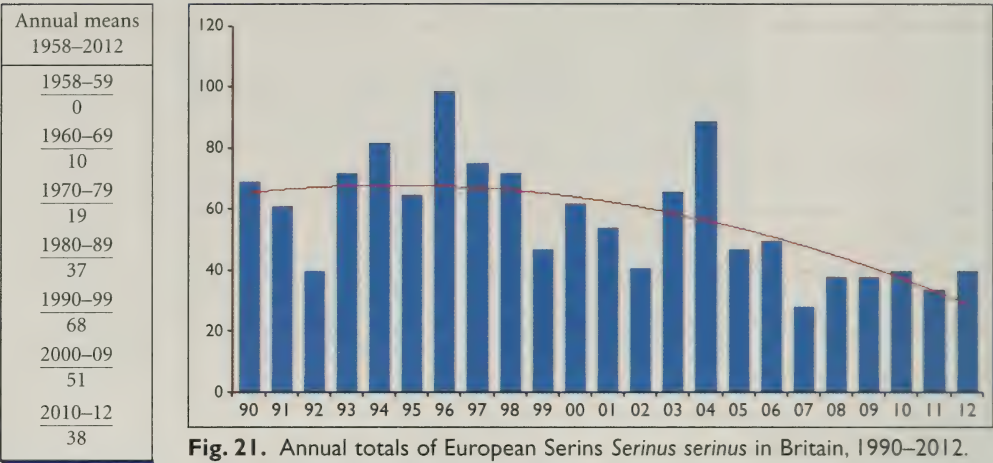


Fig. 21. Annual totals of European Serins *Serinus serinus* in Britain, 1990–2012.

After declining during the early years of this century, numbers now appear to be stabilising but at a lower level than those in the 1990s (fig. 21).

The geographical distribution in 2011 and 2012 was typical of recent years (fig. 22), with 44 along the south coast from Scilly to Sussex and 29 on the east coast between Kent and Cleveland; and none in either Scotland or Wales. All were on or near the coast with the exception of a singing male at Coniston (Cumbria) on 26th April 2011 – an intriguing record given that Serins are extremely rare in northwest England and this record was only a few kilometres from Ambleside, where there was a male on 5th May 2008.

Some 45 were seen in spring in the two years considered here, from March to June but mostly in April and May, while all of the 28 autumn records were in southern England, including nine in Scilly, seven in Kent, six in Cornwall and five in Dorset. Summering birds remain extremely unusual and none were reported in either of the years under review. However, one was on St Mary’s (Scilly) on 27th December 2012; only a handful of wintering birds have been recorded previously.

(Breeds NW Africa, much of Mediterranean and C Europe N to c. 60°N in Estonia, Turkey, Cyprus and Israel. Northern breeders winter in Mediterranean basin.)

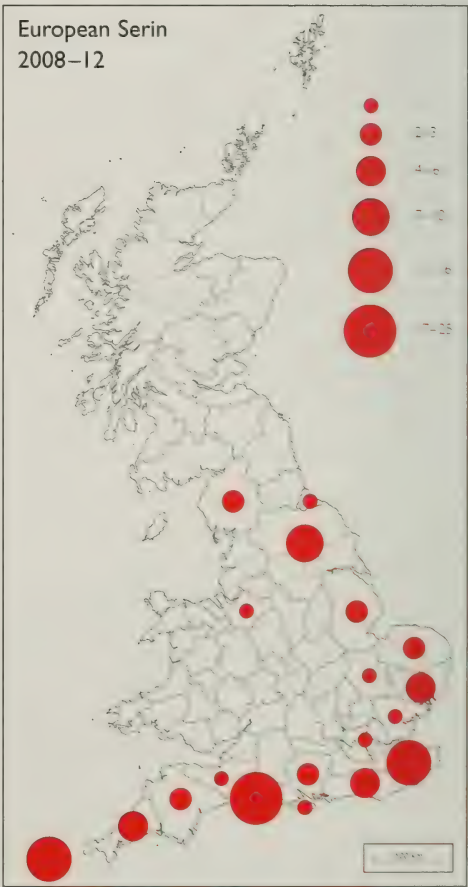


Fig. 22. Distribution of European Serins *Serinus serinus* in Britain, 2008–12.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*

Total 1968–2012	No. 2011 (rank/45)	No. 2012 (rank/45)	Other annual maxima 1968–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
2,461	27 (42)	29 (41)	1996/119/1 1969/114/2	Declining	Moderate

Annual means 1968–2009
<u>1968–69</u> 87
<u>1970–79</u> 46
<u>1980–89</u> 57
<u>1990–99</u> 72
<u>2000–09</u> 42
<u>2010–12</u> 37

After a slightly better year in 2010, numbers in 2011 and 2012 were again very poor, reflecting a decline in most western and central European countries that began in the 1930s and accelerated in the 1960s (Madge 2011).

The main concentration was in southwest England, where a total of 38 included 21 on Scilly and nine in Dorset, although almost all of these (all but two in fact) were in autumn. The five Scottish records were all in the Northern Isles, with one in spring and four in autumn, while the one Welsh record was on Skokholm (Pembrokeshire) on 8th September 2012. There were two fairly unusual English records, in Richmond Park (Greater London) on 5th May 2011 and at Fleetwood (Lancashire & N Merseyside) on 2nd September 2011. The remaining ten records were spread along the English coast between Sussex and Northumberland and divided evenly between spring and autumn.

All were singles except for four on Tresco (Scilly) on 11th–14th September 2012. Limital dates were 17th April and 1st November.

(Breeds Europe from C Spain to c. 67°N in Sweden and Finland, and E across C Russia to Baikal region, and Turkey E to N Kazakhstan. Winters across N & C equatorial Africa.)

Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
487	6 (29)	5 (35)	1993/50/1 1998/41/2	Declining	Moderate

Annual means 1958–2012
<u>1958–59</u> 3
<u>1960–69</u> 3
<u>1970–79</u> 6
<u>1980–89</u> 8
<u>1990–99</u> 20
<u>2000–09</u> 8
<u>2010–12</u> 8

The slow but seemingly inexorable decline continues; the annual mean now stands at 7.8 for the last ten years and at 8.4 since the species was removed from the BBRC list in 2006. The British situation mirrors the decline in the breeding population in Fennoscandia since the 1990s (Copete 2011).

All records for 2011 and 2012 are listed; note the coincidence of dates of the two Filey records – could this have been a returning bird?

- 2011** 3rd May, Spurn (Yorkshire) – male
15th May, Baltasound, Unst (Shetland) – female
20th May, Eshaness (Shetland) – male
21st–22nd May, Filey (Yorkshire) – male
21st–25th May, Fair Isle
4th October, Baltasound
- 2012** 21st–22nd May, Filey – male
23rd May, North Ronaldsay (Orkney) – male
24th–27th May, Sumburgh Head (Shetland) – male
30th May–8th June, Mingulay (Outer Hebrides)
31st May–1st June, Farne Islands (Northumberland) – male

(Breeds N Eurasia from Sweden & Finland, E across N Russia to E Siberia & Kamchatka, & S to Baikal region. Migrates SE to winter E China, Korean Peninsula & S Japan.)

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
1,143	32 (16)	53 (3)	2000/59/1	2005/55/2	Stable	Low

Annual means 1958–2012
1958–59 5
1960–69 5
1970–79 10
1980–89 24
1990–99 30
2000–09 33
2010–12 41

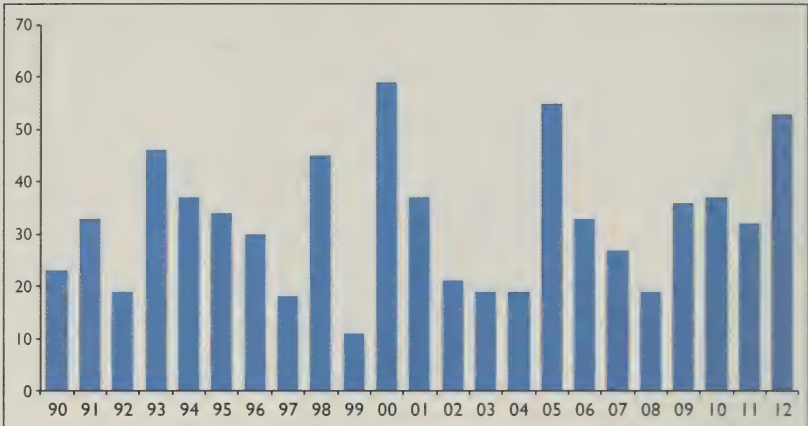


Fig. 23. Annual totals of Little Buntings *Emberiza pusilla* in Britain, 1990–2012.



126. Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*, Burnham Overy, Norfolk, October 2012.

inland record at Kingsland (Herefordshire) on 7th–8th November 2012.

This species occurs primarily in autumn, which accounted for 77 (91%) of those seen during 2011–12, the latest arrival being on 1st December 2012; the remaining eight were in spring (March to May).

(Breeds N Eurasia from N Norway and N Finland E to the Chukotskiy Peninsula & Sea of Okhotsk in E Siberia. Winters NE India to S China, S to N Thailand & N Indochina.)

Acknowledgments

Thanks are due to all the county recorders and others who sent in records and, of course, the numerous birders who submitted their records for publication in county bird reports, without whom none of this would have been possible. The role of county recorders and local records committees is absolutely vital in ensuring that reports are scrutinised and that only confirmed records make it to publication.

The BirdGuides database proved invaluable in filling gaps in records received, and special thanks are due to the Scottish Birds Records Committee and the Welsh Records Panel, who adjudicate records in their respective countries of most of the species considered here; their publications can be accessed at www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/

An excellent year in 2012 produced the highest total since 2005, and the third best since 1958 but there has been no significant trend in numbers for the past 20 or so years (fig. 23).

Little Buntings were recorded in 21 areas but as usual almost half of all records were in the Northern Isles, with 27 in Shetland, 11 on Fair Isle and four in Orkney. Four others were seen elsewhere in Scotland but only two in Wales, both on Bardsey (Caernarfonshire). The only other double-figure total was 11 on Scilly. The remainder were scattered throughout England, including one

records-committee and www.birdsinwales.org.uk/rare/wrp.htm We are also grateful to Jacquie Clark at the BTO Ringing Unit for confirming the number of Aquatic Warblers ringed in 2011–12.

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Steve White and Chris Kehoe, c/o 102 Minster Court, Crown Street, Liverpool L7 3QD,
e-mail stevewhite102@btinternet.com

Appendix 1. Updates to 2008–10 records.

As described in the introduction to part 1 (*Brit. Birds* 107: 126–157), the statistics in this report do not always follow precisely from those in the previous report (White & Kehoe 2014). Most commonly, the discrepancies involve records that were not received in time to be included and, less frequently, those that were published before they had been validated by the relevant records committee. For the passerine species, these discrepancies are all relatively minor; only two have an effect of more than 0.5% on the cumulative total of records for the species in question (Red-rumped Swallow -1.4%, Yellow-browed Warbler +0.9%, but note also that an erroneous cumulative total for Golden Oriole was published in the last report). All amendments have been incorporated into the national database and the statistics presented in this report updated. It is not possible to publish all the amendments, but those felt to be the most significant are listed below.

Great Grey Shrike: recorded in Bedfordshire in both 2008 and 2010.

Dusky Warbler: one at Lockwood Reservoir, Essex, in February 2010.

Barred Warbler: one reported at Barnetby-le-Wold, Lincolnshire, on 10th May 2008 was not accepted.

Melodious Warbler: none was recorded in Lincolnshire during 2008–10.

Marsh Warbler: one reported in Berkshire on 12th–13th June 2010 was not accepted.

Red-breasted Flycatcher: one in Luton, Bedfordshire, in November 2008.

Tawny Pipit: none was recorded in Lincolnshire during 2008–10.

Red-throated Pipit: none was recorded in Lincolnshire during 2008–10.

Common Rosefinch: one reported on the Isle of May on 2nd April 2009 was not accepted.

Coues's Arctic Redpoll: one at Thorndon CP, Essex, in December 2008.

The Spotted Crake in the UK: results of the 2012 survey

Sabine Schmitt, Mark Eaton and Allan Drewitt

Alan Harris



Abstract A UK-wide survey of Spotted Crakes *Porzana porzana* was undertaken in 2012, covering 130 wetland sites where the species had been recorded previously, and an appeal was made for records from elsewhere. In total, 28 singing males were recorded at 11 sites in Scotland and England; none was reported from Wales and Northern Ireland. The first confirmed male was heard on 2nd May in Argyll and the last on 20th July in Somerset. This represents a decline of 65% since the last national survey in 1999. Although Spotted Crake numbers fluctuate between years, and may have been adversely affected by wet weather and flooding in 2012, this decline matches the trend in numbers reported annually to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel.

Introduction

Although the Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana* is familiar to many birdwatchers as a scarce but regular migrant, most frequently found in the UK on passage in southern England and along the east coast, there is greater mystery about its status as a breeding species. Virtually impossible to see in the breeding season, singing at night and restricted to just a handful of wetland sites, this species may be justifiably described as enigmatic. Furthermore – possibly as a consequence of this elusive nature – the Spotted Crake has never been regarded as being of the highest priority

for conservation in the UK. However, although now rare, this species was once considered widespread and locally common in Britain & Ireland (e.g. Aplin 1890, 1891). Stroud *et al.* (2012) deduced that prior to the mid nineteenth century the population was ‘probably in the order of at least the upper thousands’, and it is conceivable (although conjecture) that the population had already declined by that point, owing to large-scale drainage projects in the eighteenth century, such as in the fens of East Anglia. The ongoing loss of wetland habitats through the nineteenth century is likely to have been the

cause of the decline documented by Aplin (1890, 1891) and by the twentieth century it was a very rare breeding bird, with only 62 breeding attempts reported in the first half of the century (Stroud *et al.* 2012). Despite an increase in the number of breeding records since then, it is unclear to what extent this reflects a genuine increase in abundance, or the undoubted but unquantifiable impact of greater observer activity. In any event, the Spotted Crake remains rare. It is included on the amber list of Birds of Conservation Concern (Eaton *et al.* 2009) on account of the small size of the UK breeding population. It is not red-listed by virtue of historical decline, based on the analyses of Gibbons *et al.* (1996), although that could be an oversight if its true abundance was underestimated by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors.

Throughout their range, Spotted Crakes are found breeding in freshwater marshlands (wet fens, wet grasslands and swamps; Cramp & Simmons 1980; Francis & Thorpe 1999). These are now relatively rare habitats in the UK. In 1999, the first UK-wide survey located 73 singing males (Gilbert 2002), a figure that was revised to 80 singing males by Stroud *et al.* (2012) after discovering additional records. Compared with the totals of

31 and 34 singing males reported to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP) in the years before and after the national survey year (1998 and 2000; Ogilvie *et al.* 2000, 2002), this suggests that typical annual coverage misses a considerable number of birds. At many sites, males sing for brief periods only, perhaps because they are transient birds, or because some males cease singing once paired (Schäffer 1999). Incomplete coverage is also a function of the species' nocturnal habits (most singing occurs between dusk and dawn; Bengtson 1962; Mallord 1999; Schäffer 1999) and the remote or inaccessible location of many sites. In addition, while there are 'core' sites, with records from most if not all recent years, many sites appear to be used only ephemerally, with sporadic records separated by long periods with no reports.

Another problem is that not all records are submitted to the RBBP; reporting quality is described by the RBBP as 'moderate' and Stroud *et al.* (2012) estimated that the number reported may be as low as half of the birds actually detected in any given year. In the years since the 1999 survey, annual totals of between 20 and 48 singing males were reported (Stroud *et al.* 2012). Given the extremely cryptic nature of the species, birds are rarely seen and records of proven



Peter Beesley

127. Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*, Rutland Water, Leicestershire & Rutland, August 2014.

breeding are rarer still, so the presence of territorial males, as indicated by singing, is used as a proxy for breeding (Gilbert *et al.* 1998).

Despite concerns about under-recording, data submitted to the RBBP suggest that numbers of (presumed) breeding Spotted Crakes in the UK rose from the 1970s onwards, an increase probably not entirely explained by growing observer numbers.

Regardless of the increased coverage and reporting during the 1999 survey, numbers appear to have reached a peak around the turn of the century, with the years 1998–2002 providing four of the five highest-ever reported totals. Excluding the figure from 1999, numbers compiled by Stroud *et al.* (2012) give a mean of 48 singing males for 1998–2002. By 2007–11 the five-year mean

Charlie Kitchen



Charlie Kitchen



128 & 129. The Nene Washes in Cambridgeshire, one of the most important sites for breeding Spotted Crakes *Porzana porzana* in the UK; in May 2010 (128) and May 2013 (129).

had fallen to 32, which may be a slight underestimate since it relies on RBBP figures only for the last two years, without any additional data-collecting effort. Conversely, recording effort may well have been boosted during 2008–11 owing to fieldwork for *Bird Atlas 2007–11* (Balmer *et al.* 2013).

During the breeding season, Spotted Crakes can be heard at a small number of wetland sites from Shetland to Scilly and from Wales to East Anglia, with occasional records from Northern Ireland (there are very few breeding records from the Republic of Ireland). Many of the sites involved are nature reserves and some are Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for wetland birds, although only the River Spey–Insh Marshes SPA (Highland) has been designated with Spotted Crake as a species feature. The SPA review (Stroud *et al.* 2001, but subsequently updated, see <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/UKSPA/UKSPA-A6-53.pdf>) found that the Spey–Insh Marshes and three other wetland SPAs – the Nene Washes (Cambridgeshire), the Ouse Washes (Cambridgeshire/Norfolk) and the Lower Derwent Valley (Yorkshire) – held 29% of the UK population.

Elsewhere, Spotted Crakes are found breeding from western Europe to central Asia, with wintering grounds principally in sub-Saharan Africa. Populations in western Europe tend to be small and fragmented, perhaps as a consequence of the loss of wetland habitats. Larger numbers are found in eastern Europe and the European population as a whole has been estimated at 120,000–260,000 pairs and is considered stable, although with some declines during 1990–2000 (BirdLife International 2004).

Given the insufficiencies of annual reporting, and the suggestion of a recent decline, a repeat national survey was conducted in 2012 under the Statutory Conservation Agency and RSPB Annual Breeding Bird Scheme (SCARABBS). The survey was run by the RSPB with a funding contribution from Natural England, and involved the efforts of hundreds of volunteers across the UK. In this paper we describe the survey and its findings.

Methods
Survey design and sites covered

The survey was designed to achieve adequate coverage of all sites thought likely to hold Spotted Crakes, based on records of previous occupancy. Although it is likely that Spotted Crakes may occur at other sites from which they have never been reported, we were unable to extend survey effort to cover other sites that *may* have been suitable. Consequently, we may have missed a small number of birds, particularly in the north and west where there are more small wetlands and a lower density of observers. The numbers presented here, and by Gilbert (2002) for the 1999 survey, should be regarded as minima, although we consider that the number of birds missed on unsurveyed sites is likely to be very small.

Site selection was based on data compiled by Stroud *et al.* (2012), drawing largely upon records from the RBBP and including the design and results of the 1999 survey. We also added more recent records from the RBBP and those submitted to BirdTrack (www.birdtrack.net). In all, 132 sites were identified where Spotted Crakes had been recorded during the breeding season between 1999 and 2011. These varied from isolated marshes smaller than 2 ha to large wetland complexes that required several observers to carry out the survey.

Although the survey did not aim to cover sites without previous records of Spotted Crake, an additional seven sites (mostly recently created wetlands, such as those in the Avalon Marshes complex in Somerset) were selected in cases where local observers believed there was considerable potential for Spotted Crakes. In addition, a request to report all records of singing males during

Table 1. Number of sites identified for the 2012 Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana* survey.

	Primary sites	Secondary sites	Additional sites	Total
England	18	40	3	61
Northern Ireland	0	1	0	1
Scotland	12	50	3	65
Wales	1	10	1	12
Total	31	101	7	139

2012 was made to BirdTrack users and in an article on the BirdGuides website (www.birdguides.com).

Survey design followed that of Gilbert (2002), by dividing sites into two levels that determined the intensity of surveying effort (see table 1). Primary sites were those from which singing males had been reported in at least three separate years during/since 1999, while secondary sites had records from one or two years only. Sites that were considered as high-priority (primary) sites by Gilbert were still included in our survey as secondary sites if there were no records during/since 1999.

Survey methods

Surveying was conducted by volunteers, which included many wardens, site managers and local birdwatchers. One professional fieldworker was employed to survey sites not covered by volunteers.

The survey methods were kept similar to those of the previous survey, to ensure comparability, but we extended the survey period by two weeks at the beginning (i.e. late April) to investigate the possibility that birds arrived before the main survey period or, of greater concern, that crakes pass through sites during this period but do not remain. With a number of migrant breeding species showing significant shifts in arrival dates (Hüppop & Hüppop 2003; Jonzén *et al.* 2006; Tøttrup *et al.* 2006) and earlier breeding (Forchhammer *et al.* 1998; Crick & Sparks 1999), it is conceivable that Spotted Crakes could arrive earlier than the traditional May–June period. Indeed, there have been a small number of birds singing in April in recent years but not subsequently. Surveyors were asked to monitor primary sites ideally once a week for the 11 weeks between 16th April and 30th June, but to carry out a minimum of eight visits. Secondary sites were to be visited four times, once each in the second half of April, first half of May, second half of May and first half of June.

Visits were carried out between sunset and 02.00 hrs BST on calm, mild and dry nights. Observers were asked to mark the boundary of the site on a map and the position of listening points within 500 m of all suitable habitat. Observers listened for five minutes at each point and recorded the position of any

singing crakes on a field map, coding all records according to visit and bird number. Spotted Crakes heard or seen before or after the survey period, or during an extra visit, were recorded separately. Singing males were treated as a measure of the breeding population (Gilbert *et al.* 1998); no efforts were made to look for birds, prove the presence of females, or otherwise collect evidence of breeding. Surveyors were also asked to submit all records of other nocturnal wetland species of particular conservation interest: Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*, Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*, Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla*, Corn Crake *Crex crex* and Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*.

Spotted Crakes are known to respond to playback of singing males (Mallord 1999; Schäffer 1999; Mackenzie 2000; Fox *et al.* 2013). Consequently, at three primary sites (the Nene Washes, Ouse Washes, and Lower Derwent Valley) a playback trial was carried out, to determine whether this could be a more reliable method of monitoring Spotted Crakes and reveal birds that might otherwise have been undetected. After listening for five minutes at a listening point and marking the position of any singing males, observers played a recording of a singing Spotted Crake (www.xeno-canto.org/133324) for one minute using an MP3 player and amplifier, at sufficient volume to be heard from at least 500-m range. Observers listened again for five minutes and recorded a) the impact on the behaviour of birds that had been detected already, and b) whether additional birds were heard. This was then repeated at all listening points. All playback was used under licence from Natural England; the use of unlicensed playback in the presence of breeding Spotted Crakes, a Schedule 1 species, could constitute an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Results

Survey coverage

Of the 139 sites selected across the UK, 130 were surveyed, although not all received the full complement of visits. Two primary sites, six secondary sites and one additional site were not surveyed. The spring of 2012 was unusually wet in the UK, with rather few 'calm, mild and dry' nights. After an

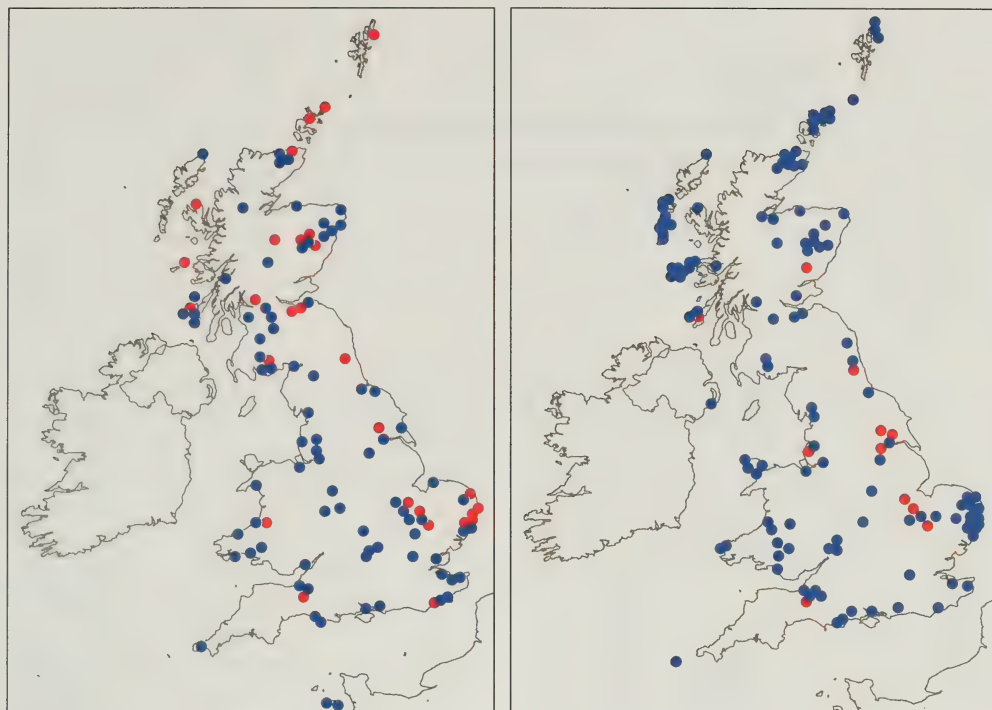


Fig. 1. The distribution of survey sites (blue dots), and sites holding singing Spotted Crakes *Porzana porzana* (red dots), in 1999 (left, from Gilbert 2002) and 2012 (right). Dots are simply indicative of general site locations, and may cover two nearby sites.

exceptionally dry winter, a hosepipe ban was enforced in southern and eastern areas in early April, yet by the month's end it was the wettest April on record (Met Office 2012a). The weather remained cool and unsettled, and there were widespread reports of flooding, until the last ten days of May, when conditions improved markedly. This respite was short-lived and the wettest June for over a century (Met Office 2012b) followed, with further flooding and difficult survey conditions in many areas. As a result, many observers were unable to find a suitable survey night within one or more of the set survey periods, while extensive flooding of some sites made access difficult or even dangerous; in a few cases flooding meant that sites became completely unsuitable for crakes. Two of the most important sites for Spotted Crakes were severely affected by the weather conditions; after the first survey visit the Ouse Washes flooded extensively and to considerable depth, and did not drain sufficiently until the end of the survey period. Flooding rendered the Lower Derwent Valley largely unsuitable for crakes from the end of

April, but partial drainage towards the end of May allowed conditions to improve sufficiently to attract Spotted Crakes.

Survey results

A total of 28 singing male Spotted Crakes were recorded, at 11 sites, including one record received from a site that was not part of the formal survey. This represents a decrease of 65% from the revised estimate of 80 singing males in the 1999 survey, and a decrease of 76% in the (revised) number of occupied sites (46). Four sites held single males, a further three sites held two, but numbers at one site, the Lower Derwent Valley, peaked at eight males. Almost three-quarters (20) of the singing males were heard at five primary sites, which includes two of the four SPAs listed previously; the four SPAs held 39% of all males, compared with 29% in 1999. Fig. 1 shows the distribution of occupied sites, from Somerset to Argyll.

Perhaps surprisingly, and contrary to the pattern found in 1999 (Gilbert 2002), when the earliest birds were recorded in the south, the first birds were heard in Scotland (in

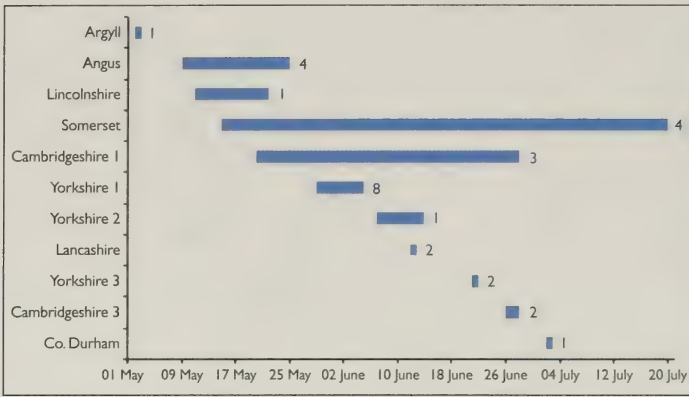


Fig. 2. Timing of occurrence of singing Spotted Crakes *Porzana porzana* at each site, identified simply by county. The numbers represent the maximum number of birds present at each site. Note that birds heard outside the survey period, when surveying and reporting coverage was unregulated, are included.

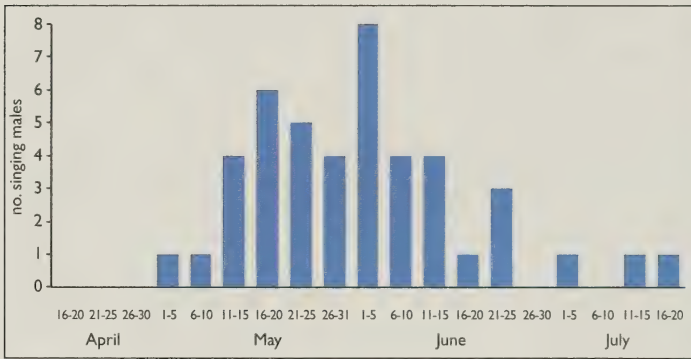


Fig. 3. Frequency distribution of singing Spotted Crakes *Porzana porzana* at five-day intervals, April–July 2012.

Argyll) at the beginning of May. In Somerset, birds were still singing on 20th July, long after the end of the survey period. At only four sites the singing males were recorded over a period of more than a week and at four other sites the birds (six individuals) were heard on only one occasion. Numbers were highest in the middle of the survey period, from mid May to mid June (fig. 3), with a peak in early June that reflects the birds at the Lower Derwent Valley. In the 1999 survey, numbers peaked between early and late May.

Playback

One of the three sites at which the playback method was tested (the Ouse Washes) flooded after the first survey visit and remained inundated. At the second site, Spotted Crakes were heard for seven consecutive days between formal survey/playback visits; the playback elicited no response

outside that apparently brief period of occupation. At the third site, playback trials coincided with the presence of two singing males. It did not lead to a response by any additional singing males, but the observers reported that song frequency appeared to increase in response to playback. It seems possible that this method may elicit responses from otherwise silent birds, if present, but further testing is clearly required.

Records of other species

Relatively few records of additional species were received but, remarkably, a minimum of six (and possibly as many as 11) singing Baillon's Crakes were discovered during the survey (Ausden *et al.* 2013; Holling *et al.* 2014). It seems likely that the requirements of the

Spotted Crane survey contributed to the discovery of these birds, but it is not certain whether similar numbers may have been previously undiscovered. Drought conditions in southern Europe in 2012 were conducive to higher than normal numbers of Baillon's Crakes pushing farther north, and record numbers in the Netherlands support this (Ausden *et al.* 2013). Despite heightened interest in and awareness of this species in the two breeding seasons since 2012, we are aware of only one other record of singing Baillon's Crakes since (at Oare Marshes, Kent), suggesting that a happy coincidence of unusually high numbers and observer activity occurred in 2012.

The impact of weather

Given the atypical conditions in the survey year and the potential impact on Spotted Crane numbers, we investigated whether

annual variations in weather conditions and the consequent impact on water levels in suitable breeding habitat might have influenced how Spotted Crake totals fluctuate between years. A polynomial trend ($r^2=0.42$) was fitted to Spotted Crake numbers (annual totals of singing males in the UK, between 1973 and 2011, using Stroud *et al.* 2012 plus RBBP data for

2010 and 2011), and residuals from this trend were correlated against Met Office precipitation data (Simpson & Jones 2012). The two national survey years, 1999 and 2012, were excluded because of the impact on numbers reported. Multiple tests were conducted looking for a relationship between variation in Spotted Crake numbers and precipitation in England and Wales during or before the breeding season: we tested monthly precipitation values from March to June, and seasonal values for winter (December–February), spring (March–May) and winter/spring (December–May). Significance testing of the results was adjusted (Bonferroni correction) to account for multiple testing.

We found a significant positive correlation between variation in Spotted Crake totals and precipitation in the April of that year ($r=0.46$, $n=37$, $P<0.05$; see fig. 4), but not with other months or seasons. This presumably reflects the impact of April rainfall on the condition of wetland sites. Yet, in 2012, which was excluded from the analysis in fig. 4, the April precipitation (149.9 mm) was the highest on record (since 1766) whereas the number of Spotted Crakes recorded was well below what we expected. It may be that the relationship between rainfall and crake numbers is not linear, and that while moderate levels of increased precipitation may mean improved (wetter) conditions at many sites there is likely to be a threshold above which more rainfall leads to excess flooding and sites becoming unsuitable. Certainly at some sites, such as the Ouse Washes, this was clearly the case in 2012. It is also possible that conditions elsewhere in Europe affect

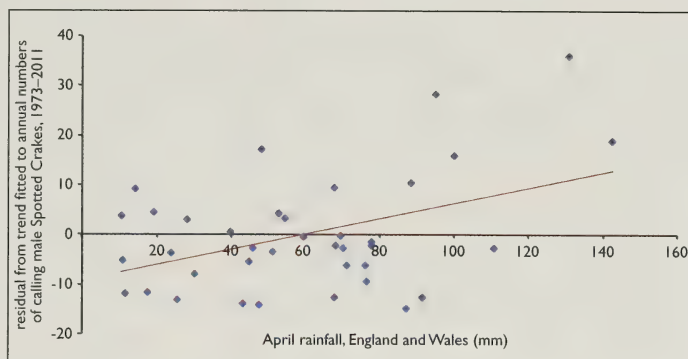


Fig. 4. Relationship between variation in average April rainfall in England and Wales and numbers of singing male Spotted Crakes *Porzana porzana*.

numbers of Spotted Crakes in the UK; the UK population is on the western fringe of a much larger population and dynamics across the wider range may be influential. Weather-driven fluctuations have been documented from other European populations. Schäffer (1999) reported ten-fold increases between dry and wet years, even hundred-fold increases when comparing extreme years in northeast Poland. In the Netherlands, national population estimates of 150–300 breeding pairs may rise in some years to 800–1,000 following influxes that occur after spring inundations (van Turnhout *et al.* 2010).

Regardless of the risk of single-year ('snapshot') survey estimates being misleading due to annual fluctuations, the annual data provide good support for the suggestion of population decline. Fig. 5 shows that fluctuations in numbers of Spotted Crakes at a standardised number of RSPB reserves between 1995 and 2012 follow a similar pattern to the national totals. Although provisional data for 2014 show that numbers at RSPB reserves in 2014 were considerably higher than in previous years, the decline in numbers is quite apparent and we know of no changes in birdwatching or recording behaviours of which this might be an artefact. Stroud *et al.* (2012) suggested that the apparent increase in numbers of Spotted Crakes in the 1970s and 1980s was likely to have been a consequence of greater numbers of observers, including the spike in totals reported around fieldwork for the 1968–72 and 1988–91 national breeding atlases; they identified a correlation between

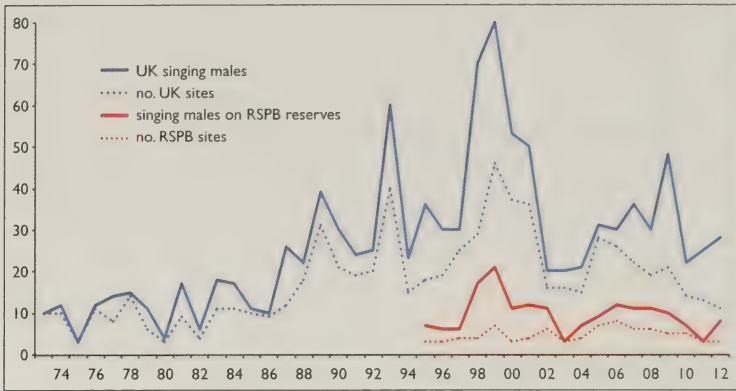


Fig. 5. Numbers of singing male Spotted Crakes *Porzana porzana* in the UK in 1973–2012 and at RSPB reserves in 1995–2012. Data from Stroud et al. (2012) for 1973–2009, from Holling et al. (2012, 2013) for 2010–11, RSPB data and this survey.

annual totals and membership of the BTO, the latter a possible proxy for the number of active fieldworkers in the UK. However, if the growth was simply a consequence of increased coverage and reporting, we might expect the number of Spotted Crakes as a proportion of all rare breeding birds to have remained constant, and that increase in recording would affect numbers reported across most if not all species. Fig. 6 shows how the percentage of all ‘pairs’ (including proxies for pairs such as singing males) of breeding birds reported to the RBBP that were Spotted Crakes (excluding species for which data were collated for only part of the period) rose through the 1970s and 1980s, peaked in the late 1990s and has declined

the proportional increase, and then decrease, of Spotted Crakes is even more apparent.

Discussion

The results from the 2012 national survey show a decline of 65% in the numbers of Spotted Crakes since the 1999 survey. There was an even greater reduction (76%) in sites occupied, with just 11 sites occupied in 2012. As for periodic single-year surveys for any species, we should consider to what extent this apparent decline might be the result of between-year variation, particularly considering the unusual weather conditions in 2012. Yet despite the wet and often windy weather restricting survey opportunities, coverage of most sites was complete, particularly

of those primary sites where crakes were most likely to occur; we believe that the great majority of birds will have been detected and that our estimate of 28 singing males is close to the actual population in 2012.

Although there is a lack of comparable data from elsewhere in Europe, reporting from Denmark suggests a similar pattern of increase and then decrease

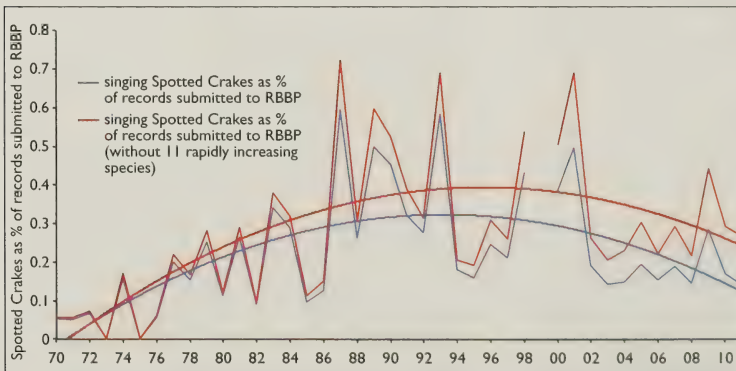


Fig. 6. Spotted Crakes *Porzana porzana* as a percentage of all rare breeding birds in the UK, 1970–2011. Data from 1999 are omitted due to the influence of the national survey in that year. Blue line shows number of singing male Spotted Crakes as % of all ‘pairs’ (or equivalent recording unit) of all species covered consistently by the RBBP; red line shows same with numbers of 11 rapidly increasing (colonising or recovering) species excluded.

over the past 40 or so years. Some 20–50 birds were recorded in 1970 but after a period of slow growth the population peaked at 175 pairs in 2003, which has been partially attributed to a number of major wetland restoration schemes (Fox *et al.* 2013). However, only 50 singing males were recorded in 2004 and numbers have fluctuated around a similar level since: 64 singing males in 2007 (Fox *et al.* 2013) and 46 in 2012 (Danish Ornithological Society 2014). In the Netherlands, the population showed peaks in the early 1990s and again in the early 2000s, but has shown a decline of 5% per annum since 1990 (SOVON 2014). Reporting on the status and trends of Spotted Crakes, required from all EU Member States under Article 12 of the EU Birds Directive, gives little evidence as to Europe-wide trends owing to the low quality of data on this poorly monitored species (EIONET 2014).

In this context, the apparent decline in the UK population over the last decade may well be real, and although far from proven might possibly be linked to a wider decline in northwest Europe. What would drive such a decline is unclear. Sites where Spotted Crakes occur, or could occur, in the UK are generally not managed specifically for this species. Spotted Crakes require consistent shallow-water areas with relatively open vegetation that does not dry out through the season (Mallord 1999; Schäffer 1999; Gilbert 2002; Fox *et al.* 2013). The habitat that Spotted Crakes seem to favour is a marginal one and may be part of a floodplain (e.g. River Spey–Insh Marshes) or a wetland habitat managed for waders (e.g. Nene Washes). The Insh Marshes, for example, have a semi-natural flooding regime where water levels are not fully regulated and the occurrence of Spotted Crakes there is thought to be influenced primarily by the water table and not grazing management (Karen Birkby pers. comm.). No Spotted Crakes were recorded singing at this site, which is designated as an SPA for this species, during a number of very wet recent years. The lack of suitable habitat may be a contributing factor in a more general decline of Spotted Crakes in the UK. The excessive flooding at some sites in 2012 surely had an effect, but figures reported were similarly low in 2010 and 2011, when respectively

14 and 13 occupied sites were reported (Holling *et al.* 2012, 2013), albeit with lower recording effort. Maturing reedbeds and habitat succession at some wetland sites may have reduced the available habitat, although more recently created or improved wetlands – such as on the Somerset Levels and in the East Anglian fens – could compensate for this if the water levels and plant communities were suitably managed for Spotted Crakes. It may be that the focus on providing much needed habitat for declining breeding populations of waders such as Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* and Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* means that the requirements for Spotted Crakes are not being met.

Further work is needed to understand the variation in numbers of Spotted Crakes between years and so to what extent the results of the 2012 survey should give cause for conservation concern. The recommendations of Stroud *et al.* (2012), who (among other steps) called for improved reporting to the RBBP via the county recorder network, would enable better annual monitoring of trends. Thorough testing of the song playback method and also an audio-recording method pioneered by Francis & Smith (in press) could provide information on the proportion of birds that might be missed by conventional survey methods, and may provide a more robust monitoring method for future national surveys.

Acknowledgments

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Sabine A. Schmitt, Mark A. Eaton and Allan L. Drewitt, RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL; e-mail Sabine.Schmitt@rspb.org.uk

Sabine Schmitt is a Senior Research Assistant in Species Monitoring & Research at the RSPB Centre for Conservation Science, working on a wide range of species of conservation concern. Mark Eaton is the RSPB's Principal Conservation Scientist with responsibility for monitoring. He oversees the Society's programme of species surveys, such as for Spotted Crake, and is the Chair of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. Allan Drewitt is a Senior Ornithologist with Natural England with responsibility for advising on the protection, management and monitoring of birds in protected areas.

Short paper

'Eastern Grasshopper Warbler' on Fair Isle: new to Britain

Abstract A Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* was trapped, ringed and released on Fair Isle on 20th September 2012. The wing length was below the range of the nominate race but matched that for 'Eastern Grasshopper Warbler' *L. n. straminea/mongolica*. DNA analysis confirmed a close match with two birds collected on the breeding grounds in Tyva in southern Siberia, within the range of *straminea/mongolica*, and one from Krasnodarskiy Kray in the Caucasus. This is the first record of one of the eastern races of Grasshopper Warbler in Britain.



Richard Johnson

At around 12.00 hrs on 20th September 2012, BR found a small, streaked *Locustella* warbler in the garden plantation at the Bird Observatory on Fair Isle. The fixed-position mist-nets in the plantation were opened and just after 14.00 hrs the bird was trapped.

The species identification initially presented a puzzle. It was a small, compact bird with bold, well-demarcated streaking on the upperparts that suggested Lanceolated Warbler *L. lanceolata*. The wing length (58 mm) was apparently too short for Grasshopper Warbler *L. naevia* and fitted Lanceolated, yet the pattern of the undertail-coverts ruled out Lanceolated and fitted Grasshopper. Reference to Svensson (1992) revealed that the wing length of Grasshopper Warbler from the east of the species' range in

central Asia (55–63 mm) is shorter than that of European birds, so the Fair Isle bird was nicely in the centre of that range. The wing length, in combination with other structural and plumage details apparent in the hand (see below and table 1), led to the bird being ringed as a Grasshopper Warbler, potentially of an eastern race. A series of photographs were taken (plate 130), while the small number of contour feathers that had been dislodged in the mist-net during capture were collected. After processing, the bird was returned to the garden, where it disappeared back into the tussocks and was not seen again.

The measurements and photographs were subsequently compared with published biometric data, descriptions and images of the various Grasshopper Warbler subspecies (e.g.

Table 1. Biometrics of the ‘Eastern Grasshopper Warbler’ *Locustella naevia straminea/mongolica* on Fair Isle, 20th September 2012 (all measurements in mm unless stated).

Wing length	58
Tail length	49
Tail/wing ratio	0.845
Emargination	P3 and P4 (slight)
P2 equal to	P4/5 (only fractionally longer than P5)
Length of notch on P2	9.1
Wing point	P3
S1 to wing-tip	10.7
Estimated tail graduation	16.1
Weight	9.3 g
Fat score (0–8)	1
Pectoral muscle score (0–3)	1

Svensson 1992, Harvey & Small 2007, Kennerley & Pearson 2010). The size, wing structure and plumage were a good match for the eastern races of Grasshopper Warbler, while genetic analysis of the feathers unequivocally supported an eastern origin for the bird and the identification as *L. n. straminea* or *L. n. mongolica*.

Description

The bird was very small and compact, in size and structure closely resembling a Lanceolated Warbler. The general impression of the upperparts also resembled this species, appearing olive-grey with neat blackish streaking. The bird was never seen well in the field and details of its appearance were noted only in the hand.

The basic ground colour of the upperparts was olive-grey, tinted buff and rather pale, while that of the underparts was very pale or whitish. The underparts were clean and unmarked, except for a very few, tiny, indistinct pale brown spots on the lower throat, and long, pointed blackish streaks on the undertail-coverts, which reached to the feather bases. The flanks and breast sides were washed pale olive-grey, patterned with large, oval, pale brown streaks towards the rear. The forehead, crown, nape and mantle were streaked dark blackish-brown (narrowly on the head); the scapulars, back and rump feathers, uppertail-coverts, upperwing-coverts and alula were bordered in olive-grey and had round, blackish-brown centres; the primaries, secondaries and rectrices were blackish-brown with olive-grey fringes. Each tertial had a dark

blackish-brown centre and olive-grey border, narrowest at the tip and along the inner web but widening down the outer web towards the feather base. The dark centre and olive-grey border of each tertial were mostly very sharply demarcated, blurring together only slightly towards the feather base. The face was rather plain, with the supercilium and ear-coverts pale olive-grey, the lores pale greyish-white, and a narrow, dark eye-stripe extending only

a short distance either side of the eye.

The iris was dark olive-brown and the narrow orbital ring white. The bill was narrow and spikey, with the upper mandible shiny black and narrowly bordered yellow along the cutting edges. The lower mandible was yellow-orange but tipped black. The bill still had a bright yellow, fleshy gape patch typical of a young bird. Based on this and the fact that the plumage was all of one generation and extremely fresh and unworn, the bird was aged as a juvenile. The legs and feet were pink.

Biometrics and wing formula

At 58 mm, the wing length of the Fair Isle bird fell below the range of the western races of Grasshopper Warbler (*L. n. naevia* 61–68 mm, *L. n. obscurior* 60–68 mm; Svensson 1992; Kennerley & Pearson 2010), but within the range of the eastern races of Grasshopper (*L. n. straminea* and *L. n. mongolica*, 53–63 mm) and of Lanceolated Warbler (52–62 mm).

Another strong pointer in the hand was the wing-formula measurements. The second-outermost primary (P2, primaries numbered ascendantly) was only fractionally longer than P5 and considerably shorter than P4. Both Harvey & Small (2007) and Kennerley & Pearson (2010) found this character to be frequent in the eastern races (P2 often <P4) but unusual in the western subspecies (P2 normally ≥P4). Moreover, P4 was weakly emarginated, a feature that Harvey & Small (2007) found in just over 50% of Grasshopper Warbler specimens of the eastern subspecies, but not at all in specimens of the



Will Miles

130. 'Eastern Grasshopper Warbler' *Locustella naevia straminea/mongolica*, Fair Isle, 20th September 2012.

western subspecies. The length of the notch on P2 was 9.1 mm and within the range of Grasshopper Warbler but not Lanceolated Warbler (Grasshopper Warbler 7.5–11.5 mm, Lanceolated Warbler 6–7.5 mm; Svensson 1992).

Tail graduation was not measured directly but an estimate was derived using measurements of first secondary to wing point and of tail graduation taken from a photograph, and the actual measurement of first secondary to wing-tip to correct for scale. This estimate of tail graduation was 16.1 mm, which is within the range of both the eastern and the western races of Grasshopper Warblers (eastern 12–25 mm, western 12–21 mm; Harvey & Small 2007).

Genetic analyses

The Grasshopper Warbler has not been extensively sampled genetically, though two relevant papers have been published (Drovetski *et al.* 2004; Kerr *et al.* 2009). In these studies, the COI and ND2 genes of birds from Norway and Sweden (*L. n. naevia*), Tyva (southern Siberia northwest of western Mongolia and probably *L. n. mongolica*), and the Caucasus at Krasnodarskiy Kray (probably *L. n. obscurior* and *L. n. straminea*) were sequenced.

The Caucasus Mountain region northeast of the Black Sea may represent a biological boundary based on altitude between the two subspecies groups: Drovetski *et al.* (2004) found that birds from the Caucasian foothills were genetically identical to those from Tyva (95°E), whereas birds from the Caucasian alpine meadows, 1,500 m above sea level, were 1.8% genetically divergent from these. It is likely, therefore, that the birds from the foothills were *L. n. straminea*¹ whereas the alpine birds were *L. n. obscurior* (though Drovetski *et al.* did not discuss this).

DNA was isolated from contour feathers of the Fair Isle bird by JMC at the University of Aberdeen. Using the universal avian primers BirdF1/R1 and L5216/H6063, the mitochondrial COI and ND2 genes were

amplified and sequenced (654 and 1013 base pairs respectively). Both gene sequences were consistent with the plumage and biometric measurements in suggesting that the bird was of one of the eastern subspecies, *L. n. straminea* or *L. n. mongolica*.

On the basis of COI sequence, the Fair Isle bird was 99.85% identical (652 out of 653 identical base pairs) to a bird from Tyva (GQ482088 www.barcodinglife.org/index.php/Public_RecordView?processid=KBPBR304-07, probably *L. n. mongolica*; Kerr *et al.* 2009). Other birds sequenced at the COI locus were of the nominate form (from Norway and Sweden, GU571460, GU571461, GU571955), from which the Fair Isle bird was 8–9 base pairs distinct, and three birds from Krasnodarskiy Kray (GQ482089, GQ482090, GQ482091; subspecies not stated, though one is given as collected at 1,850 m above sea level, which puts it in the ‘alpine group’ and possibly *L. n. obscurior*), from which the Fair Isle bird was 8–10 base pairs distinct.

The ND2 sequence of the Fair Isle bird was 99.7% identical (3–4 base pairs difference out of 1,013) to database birds AY382381, AY382382 and AY382383 (Drovetski *et al.* 2004). Two of these birds are from Tyva (probably *L. n. mongolica*) and the third came from the Caucasian foothills of the Krasnodar region (subspecies not stated, but inferred to be *L. n. straminea*; see above). The Fair Isle bird was 98% identical (20–21 base pairs different) from four birds (AY382382–AY382385) from the Caucasian alpine meadows of the Krasnodar region. This is consistent with the COI data (i.e. that the Fair Isle bird is not of a Caucasian alpine population). No European birds have been sequenced at ND2.

The ND2 and COI data are coincident and both unequivocally support an eastern origin for the Fair Isle bird, somewhere within the range of *L. n. straminea* or *L. n. mongolica*. Notwithstanding the limited sampling, on current knowledge the conclusion eliminates the possibility of a European origin. There has been only one ‘possible’ specimen of

¹ This appears to be the first time that *straminea* has been recorded from the Caucasus region, and the collection date of 9th July 1998 suggests the bird was breeding there. This would extend the breeding range of *straminea* to the south and west of the known range, which was believed to lie to the east of the Volga River in Russia.

L. n. straminea sequenced, so the similarity of the sequence of the Fair Isle bird to that of birds that are probably *L. n. mongolica* should not necessarily imply that the Fair Isle bird was more likely to be *L. n. mongolica*. This is because *L. n. straminea* and *L. n. mongolica* are likely to be genetically very similar – and of course the Fair Isle bird is geographically more likely to be *L. n. straminea*.

Distribution

Four subspecies of Grasshopper Warbler are currently recognised by BOU. Based on similarities in plumage and biometrics these are widely considered to form two distinct groups: the ‘western’ subspecies *L. n. naevia* and *L. n. obscurior*, and the ‘eastern’ *L. n. straminea* and *L. n. mongolica* (BWP; Svensson 1992; Harvey & Small 2007). Stepanyan (2003) and Kennerley & Pearson (2010) did not recognise *mongolica*, which they considered to be a synonym of *straminea*. The boundary between the two subspecies groups lies between 46°E and 55°E (BWP).

‘Eastern Grasshopper Warbler’ occurs east from the Volga River in Russia, across the West Siberian Plain, to the Tien Shan Mountains in southeastern Kazakhstan (*L. n. straminea*), and in northeastern Kazakhstan, western China, southern Siberia and northwest Mongolia (*L. n. mongolica*). ‘Western Grasshopper Warbler’ occurs across Europe east to central European Russia; a distribution represented entirely by *L. n. naevia*, except for the extreme southeast, where *L. n. obscurior* occurs, apparently isolated from *L. n. naevia* and restricted to the Caucasus Mountains in Russia and Georgia and the mountains forming the borders between Georgia, Armenia, northeast Turkey and the Krasnodar region of southern Russia (BWP; Harvey & Small 2007; Kennerley & Pearson 2010).

Will Miles, David Parnaby, Becki Rosser and Jason Moss, c/o Fair Isle Bird Observatory,
Fair Isle, Shetland ZE2 9JU; e-mail: willtsmiles@hotmail.com, fibo@btconnect.com
J. Martin Collinson, Institute of Medical Sciences, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen AB25 2ZD;
e-mail: m.collinson@abdn.ac.uk

Editorial comment Adam Rowlands, Chairman of BBRC, commented: ‘Grasshopper Warblers of the eastern subspecies *L. n. straminea* and *L. n. mongolica* represent likely vagrants and have been on the radar of rarity hunters in western Europe for some time now. Three previous records submitted to BBRC in the 1990s were analysed in Harvey & Small (2007), and the assessment of those records developed the criteria for identification in a British context. Those criteria proved invaluable in the assessment of the Fair Isle bird.

Discussion

Considering Fair Isle’s outstanding track record for attracting vagrant *Locustella* warblers in autumn, the bird’s location and timing are perhaps not a great surprise. Unusually, even if field views had been good, this rarity could not have been confirmed in the field. Identification of ‘Eastern Grasshopper Warbler’ currently depends on examination and measurements taken in the hand, in this case followed by genetic confirmation. The size, structure and some plumage characters of the Fair Isle bird closely resembled those of Lanceolated Warbler; nonetheless, distinguishing ‘Eastern Grasshopper Warbler’ from Lanceolated presents relatively few potential difficulties compared with separation from a small ‘Western Grasshopper Warbler’.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to Paul Harvey and Brian Small for advice and discussion regarding Grasshopper Warbler subspecies identification.

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'BBRC is dependent on the expertise provided by Martin Collinson (the Committee's genetic consultant) and voting member Steve Votier when determining the level of confidence that can be applied to DNA results in relation to the identification of "cryptic" taxa. Their support for this record was crucial to the BBRC acceptance, even though the biometric and morphological features supported the diagnostic genetic evidence. The bird was unanimously accepted as being from the eastern group (*straminea/mongolica*) on first circulation and then passed to BOURC.

'Ultimately, the DNA evidence was fundamental in confirming the identification of the Fair Isle bird. Although the biometric data were strongly indicative of one of the eastern races, the key measurements were all in the overlap zone between eastern and western, according to the data summarised in Harvey & Small (2007). Interestingly, the wing formula and measurements of a Grasshopper Warbler trapped in Shetland in May 2013 (plate 131) were also suggestive of possible eastern origin. Key measurements of that bird included wing length 60.5 mm, tail 55.0 mm, tail graduation 20.0 mm, P2 level with P4, slight emargination of P4 (the last previously considered potentially diagnostic of the eastern forms). However, genetic analysis (also by Martin Collinson and his team) showed that this bird fell within the western group. See <http://birdingfrontiers.com/2013/05/18>

'At present, only birds with measurements outwith the range of western or that provide material for DNA analysis are likely to be accepted as eastern, which in turn means that these races probably occur more frequently than documented records suggest. It seems likely that the Sheringham bird of September 1998 (Harvey & Small 2007) was also one of the eastern races, but unfortunately the level of documentation was not sufficiently robust for a "first".

'The recommendations of Harvey & Small (2007) still hold good, but the Fair Isle and May 2013 Shetland records have certainly provided further insight into the identification of these forms. Any further revisions to the BBRC approach will be published on our website (www.bbrc.org.uk/species-information-riact).'

Martin Collinson, Chairman of BOURC, commented: 'Given the Northern Isles' near-monopoly on Lanceolated Warblers, it was perhaps no surprise that Britain's first "Eastern Grasshopper Warbler" was recorded on Fair Isle. The differences between *straminea* and *mongolica* are slight, and, as suggested above, these subspecies may be synonymised. BOURC considered that the biometrics and plumage, supported by genetic analysis, conclusively identified the bird as one of these eastern subspecies, to the exclusion of the western subspecies, *naevia* and *obscurior*. This was without doubt a wild bird – there was no question over provenance – and hence the Eastern Grasshopper Warbler subspecies group was accepted to the British List.

'No very thorough phylogenetic study of Grasshopper Warbler, incorporating samples of all four subspecies from across the range of the species, has yet been published. The data from Krasnodar suggest there is much we still do not know about the geographic nature of genetic variation in this species – there may be some surprises in store. Should the eastern and western subspecies groups be split in future, the Fair Isle record will take on added importance.'



131. The Fair Isle 'Eastern Grasshopper Warbler', September 2012 (left), and the wing of a small nominate Grasshopper Warbler from Shetland, May 2013. Note the weakly emarginated P4 on both birds, but also the much shorter P2 (outermost long primary) of the Fair Isle bird.

European Bee-eaters using artificial nest sites in Italy

The European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* is a widespread breeding bird throughout much of Italy, although more localised in Sicily, with an estimated population of 7,000–13,000 pairs (Brichetti & Fracasso 2007). The species' range has expanded during the twentieth century, particularly since the mid 1980s, mainly in the central Po Valley, but also in the southern regions and in Sicily (Fraissinet & Mastronardi 1997).

This note describes Bee-eaters using an artificial nest site, which was established in May 2013 in a complex of newly built terraced houses (of which only one was inhabited), on the outskirts of Cadignano, a small rural village near Verolanuova, in a lowland area of Brescia, in northern Italy. The houses are bordered on two sides by arable fields, separated by lines of trees. The wall used for nesting is a concrete retaining wall, which forms the boundary on three sides of a small yard, in front of the entrance to a row of garages. The wall is about 30 cm thick, 2.85 m high (although on one side 2.30 m of the wall is below ground level) and 61 m long, most of it facing south. During construction, 16 holes were built into the wall for water drainage. The entrance holes are 9–10 cm in diameter and sited 1.30 m above ground and 4 m apart; coated inside with a plastic tube, the entrance is a rather irregular spherical shape (fig. 1, plate 132).

During May–August 2013, the site was visited seven times. On the first visit, on 15th May, there were 24 adults in the vicinity of the holes, either feeding nearby or resting on suitable perches. Visits on 17th and 23rd May confirmed the presence of roughly the same number of adults, which were attending ten of the holes. Unfortunately, on subsequent visits, nine of

the holes were blocked by local residents and one was unusable by Bee-eaters because the entrance was too small. On 6th June, a total of ten adults were present, while on 5th July four pairs were attending nest holes regularly. On 30th July, successful nesting in these four burrows was confirmed by the presence of insect remains and earthy material below the nest entrance and/or adults entering burrows with food. On this visit, 11 fledged young were counted. On 28th August the colony had been abandoned, and the depth of the nest holes of the four successful burrows were 70, 80, 125 and 140 cm (these figures include 30 cm of the concrete hole). In the two remaining holes, the total burrow depth was only 40 cm, indicating that nests had



Pierandrea Brichetti

132. A group of adult European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster* resting on a wire mesh fence above the concrete retaining wall described in this note, and with entrance holes visible; Cadignano di Verolanuova, Brescia, Italy, May 2013.

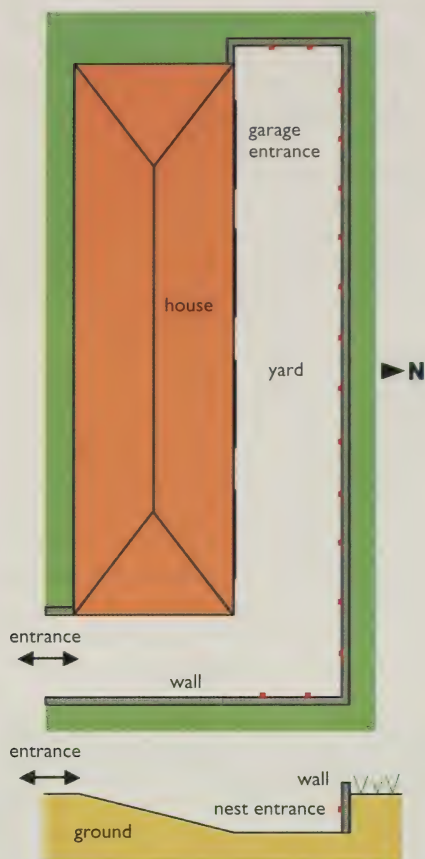


Fig. 1. Schematic diagram of the nesting area.

Pierandrea Brichetti, Via Vittorio Veneto 30, 25029 Verolavecchia (BS), Italy;
e-mail pbrichetti@alice.it

been started but not completed.

I am not aware that the use of artificial nest sites by Bee-eaters in this way has previously been reported in Europe (see Fry 1984, Cramp 1985, del Hoyo *et al.* 2001). Choosing such an artificial site could be related to a significant increase in the local breeding population and/or the availability of natural nesting sites. In the longer term, if such sites continue to be used by Bee-eaters, it will be interesting to see whether their reproductive success is higher within them, since the holes are less accessible to predators such as rats and snakes.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Eugenio Zanotti for information and Laura Bricchi for help with my English.

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Reed Warbler singing from mist-net

At 06.45 hrs on 17th May 2014, I saw a small bird (which subsequently proved to be a Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) fly into a mist-net set in my garden. As I went to retrieve the bird, I realised that it was singing from the mist-net. I noticed the song when about 5 m from the net, and the bird continued to sing until I arrived at the net to extract it. The nearest breeding site (and suitable breeding habitat) for Reed Warblers is probably the RSPB Conwy reserve, about 8 km from my garden, and it seems most likely that the bird was still on migration.

Spencer (1971) also reported a Reed

Warbler singing from a mist-net, although on that occasion the netted bird was close to a reedbed and, presumably, its territory. As Bob Spencer noted, it is not uncommon for ringers to record birds singing in the hand or in a bird-bag, which is generally considered to be a form of displacement activity. However, song from a bird in a mist-net appears to be much less commonly recorded, certainly away from a breeding site.

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Stuart Thomas, Dursley, 9A Whitehall Road, Rhos-on-Sea, Colwyn Bay, Conwy LL28 4HW

Reviews

Birds of the Homeplace: the lives of Ireland's familiar birds

By Anthony McGeehan, with Julian Wyllie
The Collins Press, Cork 2014

Hbk, 232pp; colour photographs and compositions throughout
ISBN 978-1-84889-229-3
£19.99

To follow the well-received *Birds Through Irish Eyes*, Anthony McGeehan now invites the close attention of his compatriots to 26 non-passerine and 55 passerine birds. These are the species that are most likely to be seen around Irish homes and workplaces. They are addressed in two media: Anthony's energising prose and, via his developing mastery of Photoshop, his photographs. With Julian Wyllie continuing as ornithological 'sweeper' and grammarian, the result is an Irish encouragement not just to tick but also to know and enjoy familiar birds. Its offer of a renewed 'Man-Bird Commonwealth' is as relevant to Britain as to the Green Isle. Its injunction to such care is no less compelling than Anthony's past enthusiasm for rarer species and his performance as a warden.

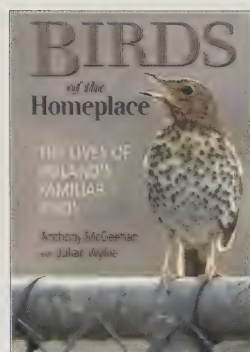
The book's text takes two approaches to its theme. The first is an array of 25 informative essays that discuss mostly ornithological tenets but also praise the redoubtable, late-nineteenth-century migration student R. M. Barrington and give advice on birdwatching aids. The second is a sequence of arresting portraits of the 81 spotlight birds. On first read I found the latter and their so-focused illustrations the easier to enjoy. As stepping-stones not just to the species but also to their personae, they are well placed and are accompanied by the pearls of delight that Anthony brings out from contacts with even seemingly mundane species.

At this point, I just have to recall the night of 14th/15th October 1995. After eight days of

our first-ever group migration watch in westernmost Co. Donegal (*Brit. Birds*

94: 103–120), Anthony relapsed into twitcher mode but suffered (after seven hours of wind- and rain-tunnel south to Clare) a total dip (of Ireland's second Yellow Warbler *Setophaga petechia*). At Belfast Airport late on the 15th, he sensibly converted it into a watershed (sic) event. From then on, his would be a broader vision. Its presence and the gift of it to others became ever clearer when I read the opening essays of the book again, more slowly. As the breadth of historical references (a hundred dated from 1804 to 2013) and the depth of personal and close-friend observations (not least from Neville McKee, denizen of Copeland Bird Observatory) became ever more obvious, so did the book's effect. It compelled close attention and put my incomplete knowledge to shame. Whether the scholarship will deliver easy reading to beginners I remain unsure but I cannot think of any person in touch with birds who will not benefit directly from the book's remarkable span of subject and inspiration. And nobody will not revel in the lovely photographic compositions and their always apt captions. Anthony and Julian, and their publisher, have added another passport to Ireland's and Europe's common excellent birds.

Ian Wallace



The Birds of Herefordshire

By Herefordshire Ornithological Club
Liverpool University Press, 2014

Hbk, 446pp; numerous coloured maps, photographs and tables
ISBN 978-1-78138-126-7.
£45.00

This attractive, large-format volume documents the results of the first tetrad survey of breeding and wintering birds in Herefordshire. *Bird Atlas 2007–11* provided the framework and online recording system for the survey, as in many other counties.

The first chapter describes the landscape and

habitats of Herefordshire; seven distinct regions of the county, including the Malvern Hills and Forest of Dean, are identified; changes in farming practices and other land use are docu-



mented; and it is illustrated by several maps and some superb aerial photographs. This is followed by a review of the weather during the survey period and its effect on the birds, a description of the survey, data analysis and mapping methods, and an overview of the results with a particular emphasis on the status of amber- and red-listed species.

The species accounts make up the bulk of the book. Regularly occurring species get a double- or single-page spread, which comprises text, very clear coloured maps and a table showing statistics from the summer and winter surveys and estimates of the Hereford and GB populations of breeding species. The texts contain perhaps too much information about the general biology and behaviour of each species, which is readily available elsewhere; this space could have been utilised for a rather more rigorous description of past history and current status in the county. The maps show winter presence and abundance combined and/or breeding status and summer abundance. Some scarcer species by necessity have only a winter presence map or one combining winter and summer records. All of this is accompanied by a selection of excellent photographs; unfortunately the captions give only the photographers' names

and omit the date and locality. Every account includes a line-drawing, the style of which may not be to the taste of every reader. Less regular species follow the main accounts and get half a page each; these in turn are followed by rarer species, five to a page. Personally, I think it is a pity that the current taxonomic order was not followed by using more imagination in the page layouts.

The book concludes with various appendices including a list of all surveyors, a county list and various tabulated results from the surveys, references and index.

This is an excellent production, for which the Herefordshire Ornithological Club team deserves many congratulations. It provides a mass of data on the birds of the county which form a baseline against which future changes can be measured. There are now two major challenges for the Club. One is to compile a complete avifauna, which was undoubtedly an opportunity missed here; and the second is to organise a repeat survey in 10–15 years' time so that change maps, which have been such an interesting component of other recently published county avifaunas, can be compiled.

John Clark

Ducks, Geese, and Swans of North America

By Guy Baldassarre

Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014

Hbk, two vols, 1,027pp; 144 colour photos, 138 colour illustrations and 50 colour maps, CD-ROM also included
ISBN 978-1-4214-0751-7

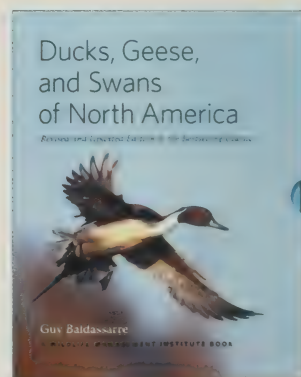
£44.95

Although public interest in waterfowl in the UK is considerable, it is put completely in the shade by the huge affection that people in North America feel for this bird family. For example, one US charity specialising in waterfowl conservation has around 600,000 members, and recently organised a dinner at which over \$1.5 million was raised in just one evening! So any book on wildfowl is likely to attract a lot of interest. This book has been a best-seller since it first appeared in 1942. That edition was authored by Francis Kortright and later revised by Frank Bellrose in 1976 and 1980. Those three books sold over a million copies in total, making this the most popular book on waterfowl anywhere in the world.

This latest revision has been carefully updated by Guy Baldassarre, a renowned waterfowl biologist who sadly died before seeing it in print. It is twice the size of the previous versions, reflecting the wealth of knowledge that has accumulated in the 35 years since the last edition.

All 46 species breeding in North America are discussed in great detail. Taking Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* as an example, the text for this widespread species is well over 20,000 words in length, while the restricted-range Masked Duck *Nomonyx dominicus* is covered in just 2,500 words. Apart from the key information on identification and distribution, all major aspects of each species' life are explored. These texts cover migration, habitat choice, population trends, breeding biology, recruitment and survival, feeding ecology, plus moults and plumage variations. For most species there is also a section on conservation and land management.

Colour maps show both winter and breeding ranges within North America, but not elsewhere. The book is illustrated by top waterfowl photo-



graphers, and the selection of images is pleasing – although, because of the large number of pages, these are somewhat swamped by the text. As in the last edition, each species is illustrated in a painting by Bob Hines. In addition to a static pose, there are illustrations of the open wing – but not actually of the birds in flight.

Two appendices contain a map of important waterfowl areas in North America and three pages of colour illustrations of the various ducklings, goslings and cygnets. A CD-ROM contains additional maps of the USA, Canada and Mexico, plus a bibliography of nearly 3,000 references. I like the fact that these can be word-searched easily.

This book was published for the Wildlife

Management Institute, which has a strong pedigree in wildlife conservation for the purposes of hunting. Vast areas of land have been set aside in North America for waterfowl to use for breeding and wintering and much has been learnt from this over the years. While there are conservation messages throughout this book, I was surprised not to find chapters giving an overview about waterfowl as a whole, and perhaps more about habitat conservation and best practice for managing land for ducks, geese and swans. That aside, this will surely be yet another best-selling book, for those with or without a gun.

Keith Betton

Britain's Habitats: a guide to the wildlife habitats of Britain and Ireland

By Sophie Lake, Durwyn Liley, Robert Still and Andy Swash
Princeton University Press, 2015

Hbk, 272pp; colour photographs throughout

ISBN 978-0-691-15855-6

£27.95

The diversity of species in Britain and Ireland may not be exceptional, but we are fortunate that our islands contain an astonishing diversity of landscapes. The complex geology, varied climate and long history of human influence have combined to concentrate an enormous variety of scenery and vegetation into a small part of the planet. Naturalists derive much pleasure from working out how birds and other wildlife fit into this mosaic. And, of course, understanding the links between species and habitat is a fundamental basis of nature conservation. This ambitious book succeeds in describing the range of habitat types that exist in Britain and Ireland in an informative but engaging way. For anyone wanting to learn more about the fabric and texture of the countryside, the book is an excellent starting point. The design and presentation are attractive and the book is profusely illustrated with photographs and maps.

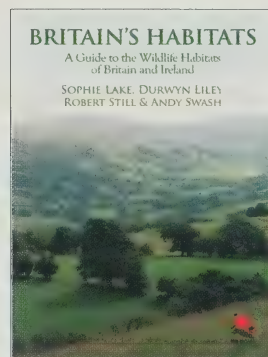
It is a daunting task to make sense of the complex, often subtle, gradients and variants that need to be accounted for in any useful description of habitats. In reality it can be hard to decide where one habitat ends and another begins. One is sometimes tempted to ask what exactly is 'a habitat'? Humans tend to parcel up the countryside into 'habitats' perceived as distinctive in terms of vegetation, land use and other factors such as flooding and topography. This approach helps us to make sense of the variation around us and is widely used in conservation planning, though it has very limited value in identifying the critical habitat

requirements of individual plants, insects or birds. In this book 73 types

of habitat are recognised, arranged under ten sections: woodland (12 habitats), scrub (3), heathlands (9), grasslands (10), mountains (4), rocky habitats (3), bogs and fens (6), freshwaters (14), coastal habitats (9) and other habitats (3). The last category covers arable, brownfield and orchards. Marine habitats are not covered. Doubtless some will quibble over the exact choice of habitat types but the selection and structure work reasonably well for me.

The text ranges widely, covering historical origins, cultural importance and conservation aspects. For each habitat type there is a map showing distribution and extent. The sources for these maps are diverse and in a few cases produced surprising patterns. For example, Wales emerges as exceptionally rich in wet woodland while Atlantic oak woods are strongly represented in northeast Scotland. Species to look out for are listed, though these can seem somewhat selective and appear intended to give a flavour of the habitat's inhabitants. The mention of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor* as a species of lowland dry oak *Quercus* and birch *Betula* wood, for instance, seemed somewhat arbitrary as the bird still occurs, albeit at much reduced density, across a range of woodland types.

There are many things I like about this book.



Habitat features that are especially important in a European or even global context are mentioned. The authors fully acknowledge the complex reality of vegetation and the transitions upon which so many species depend. It is good to see that scrub and bracken are treated as important habitat categories in their own right; these much maligned vegetation types are often poorly recognised in accounts of habitats of conservation value. Wood-pasture is treated as one of the 73 habitat types – this is valuable because these woodland systems are increasingly recognised as especially distinctive in terms of structure and ancient trees. It could be argued, however, that traditionally managed coppice could also have been included on the grounds that it too is a distinctive woodland structure important for many plants and animals. An extremely useful feature is the inclusion of habitat correspondence tables. These show how the habitat categories used in the book relate to those employed in other well-known classifications such as the National Vegetation Classification.

‘Wildlife habitats’ appears in the subtitle but I remain unsure what this really means. Arguably,

virtually all parcels of land support wildlife of some kind. Whilst the emphasis of the book is firmly on semi-natural habitats where extreme human influences are not evident, the inclusion of arable land and conifer plantations could seem a little inconsistent. On the subject of titles, it is odd that Ireland doesn’t feature in the main title. If a second edition is produced, a more comprehensive index would be welcome, and possibly a glossary, and a more extended list of relevant literature.

Any criticisms I have are relatively minor. This book achieves its aims admirably – to provide a clear description of habitats and enable them to be recognised with confidence. While the book is unlikely to appeal to every birder, anyone wanting to develop a better appreciation of basic habitat types will find much of interest. For a more in-depth treatment of similar topics they may wish to consult Michael Proctor’s recent *New Naturalist* on the *Vegetation of Britain and Ireland*. These two complementary books differ strikingly in style but both have much to offer the serious naturalist.

Rob Fuller

Moult, Ageing and Sexing of Finnish Owls

By Heimo Mikkola and Jouni Lamminmäki

The Ornithological Society of Suomenselkä, Saarijärvi, 2014

Pbk, 96pp; photographs and line-drawings

ISBN 978-951-98263-1-8

£17.50

Until now, accurate data on the moult of European owls has been somewhat fragmented. This hand-book brings together all current knowledge available on the moult, age and sex determination of the 13 species of European owl. The book begins with a useful glossary of terms and abbreviations used in the tables and throughout the text. It is followed by a general overview of moult and its use in ageing and sexing, and aspects such as the process and sequences of moult, how moult varies between species due to influences such as habitat, reversed sexual dimorphism (RSD), breeding cycle, migratory or sedentary behaviour, and the various investigative methods used in determining age and sex. The remainder of the book consists of detailed species chapters comprising three sections: moult (with detailed information on the moult strategy); ageing (analysis of feather shape, colour and pattern during each moult cycle); and sexing (analysis of weights and measurements with corresponding tables).

I found this book to be highly detailed, informative and easy to use in locating specific data quickly. It is published in both

Finnish and English, but the English translation is shorter and may not reflect all the details given in the original Finnish text; although I did not get the impression that I was ‘missing’ something, there is surely scope for a future ‘English’ edition. My only criticism would be in the layout of the dual language keys for the tables, as they are not easily readable at a glance. This is an ambitious work and, while not perhaps definitive (the authors admit that further research needs to be carried out on some species), it will surely prove to be an extremely valuable resource.

Alan Sieradzki



Recent reports

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Harry Hussey

This summary of unchecked reports covers early February to early March 2015.

Headlines Typically for this season, 'new' rarities were few and far between. Another Harlequin Duck arrived in northern Scotland while a second Pacific Diver was seen off the Cornish coast. A Two-barred Crossbill appeared briefly in Gloucestershire, while a 'Thayer's Gull' in Yorkshire may have been the same individual seen last December. There were two new Bonaparte's Gulls while two more Little Buntings made for a small influx (but how many others go unnoticed?). More impressive influxes were of Iceland Gulls in northern Scotland and Water Pipits in the south.

Ross's Goose *Anser rossii* Stobswood (Northumberland), long-stayer to 8th March. **Canada Goose** *Branta canadensis* Small race, North Slob (Co. Wexford), long-stayer to 7th March; Malin town (Co. Donegal), 18th February. **Cackling Goose** *Branta hutchinsii* Long-stayers North Uist (Outer Hebrides), to 9th February, and Cults Loch area (Dumfries & Galloway), to 8th March; Islay (Argyll), 16th February to 4th March, with two on 18th February; West Rise Marsh (Sussex), 25th February. **American Wigeon** *Anas americana* Long-stayers Co. Cork, Cornwall (three), Co. Donegal, North-east Scotland, Nottinghamshire, Shetland, Co. Wexford and Yorkshire; new arrivals at Hunterston Lagoon (Ayrshire), Trawbreaga Bay (Co. Donegal), Shapinsay (Orkney) and North Uist (Outer Hebrides). **Black Duck** *Anas rubripes* Tresco (Scilly), long-stayer to 4th March. **Blue-winged Teal** *Anas discors* The Shunan (Orkney), long-stayer to 8th March. **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* Slimbridge (Gloucestershire), long-stayer to 2nd March.

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis* Long-stayers at various sites in Ayrshire, Llangorse Lake (Breconshire), Cardiff Bay Wetlands (East Glamorgan) and Lough Gill (Co. Kerry); new arrivals Lough Parasee (Co. Cavan), 19th–25th February; Col-liford Lake (Cornwall), 7th–8th March; Lough Gara (Co. Sligo), 8th March. **King Eider** *Somateria spectabilis* Long-stayers Maenporth (Cornwall), Ruddon's Point (Fife) and Bluemull Sound (Shetland). **Harlequin Duck** *Histrionicus histrionicus* River Don (North-east Scotland), long-stayer to 8th March; Brora (Highland), intermittently, 17th–27th February. **Black Scoter** *Melanitta americana* Long-

stayers Rossbeigh (Co. Kerry), to 8th March, and Cheswick Sands (Northumberland), to 2nd March. **Surf Scoter** *Melanitta perspicillata* Long-stayers in Denbighshire (up to three), Fife, Lothian, Suffolk/Essex and Co. Wexford; new arrivals at Filey Brigg, then Scarborough (both Yorkshire), Stokes Bay (Hampshire) and Rerwick Head (Orkney).

Pacific Diver *Gavia pacifica* In Cornwall, long-stayer at Mount's Bay to 8th March, and another at Pendower Beach, 19th February at least. **White-billed Diver** *Gavia adamsii* Long-stayers off South Ronaldsay (Orkney) and in South Nesting Bay (Shetland); Loch Ewe (Highland), two, 11th February.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* In Kent, two long-stayers at Dungeness, and another at Hamstreet, 11th February. **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* Records from Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Lancashire & N Merseyside, Nottinghamshire, Co. Waterford and Co. Wexford.



133. Juvenile 'Thayer's Gull' *Larus (glaucooides) thayeri*, Rufford, Yorkshire, March 2015.

Tom Lowe

Graham Catley



134. 'Black-bellied Dipper' *Cinclus c. cinclus*, Harpham, Yorkshire, February 2015.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* Derwent Resr (Co. Durham), 8th March.

American Coot *Fulica americana* Long-stayers Lough Gill, to 5th March, and North Uist to 8th March. **Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes* Long-stayers Rogerstown (Co. Dublin), to 6th March, and Pett Level/Rye Harbour areas (Sussex), to 21st February.

Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri* Claddagh (Co. Galway), long-stayer to 6th March. **Bona-partre's Gull** *Chroicocephalus philadelphia* Long-stayers Dawlish Warren/Exmouth (Devon), to 7th March; Cardiff Bay, to 8th March; also Thurso (Highland), 3rd March; Chesil Beach, then Ferrybridge, then Port-

land (all Dorset), 7th March. **Laughing Gull** *Larus atricilla* Long-stayers New Brighton (Cheshire & Wirral), to 8th March, and Ballycotton (Co. Cork), to 5th March. **Iceland Gull** *Larus glaucooides* An influx in the north and west, with peak counts in the Outer Hebrides of 15 on South Uist on 25th February and 72 on Lewis on 8th March; in Shetland, 11 on Unst on 19th February and eight in Lerwick on 21st. **'Thayer's Gull'** *Larus (glaucooides) thayeri* Rufford Airfield (Yorkshire), 2nd–3rd March.

'Dark-breasted Barn Owl' *Tyto alba guttata* Welney (Norfolk), 15th February. **Gyr Falcon** *Falco rusticolus* Lough Gill, 19th February to 6th March; Inishbofin (Co. Galway), c. 21st February.

Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* In Devon, three long-stayers, at Darts Farm/Topsham, to 2nd March, two to 8th, same three at Exminster Marshes on 14th February. **Rose-coloured Starling** *Pastor roseus* Prudhoe (Northumberland), long-stayer to 9th February. **'Black-bellied Dipper'** *Cinclus c. cinclus* Harpham (Yorkshire), 10th February to 8th March; Unst, 24th February to 4th March; Voe (Shetland), 2nd–7th March. **Water Pipit** *Anthus spinoletta* Influx, with peak count of 41 at Sutton Gault (Cambridgeshire), 28th February. **Arctic Redpoll** *Acanthis hornemanni*

Lucan (Co. Dublin), 27th–28th February. **Two-barred Crossbill** *Loxia leucoptera* Forest of Dean (Gloucestershire), 15th February. **Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla* Forest Farm CP (East Glamorgan), long-stayer to 8th March; Gulval (Cornwall), 10th February to 8th March; Ashdown Forest (Sussex), 10th–27th February.

Rich Andrews



135. Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*, East Glamorgan, February 2015.



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